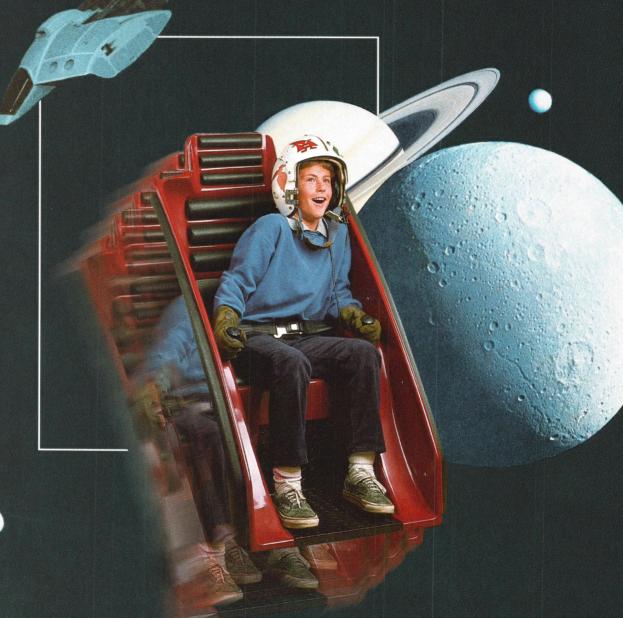


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NOTEWORTHY



Detroit Historical Museum

Detroit Historical Museum has opened Wrigley Hall: The Detroit Antique Toy Museum Gallery and an adjacent history education center. The effort represents the museum's largest construction project in more than 20 years. The gallery will house exhibitions selected from the 10,000 toys in the combined holdings of the Lawrence Scripps Wilkinson Collection and the historical museum's own collection.

American Craft Museum in New York City has launched "The History of TwentiethCentury American Craft: A Centenary Project." The project is a 10-year effort to write the history of American craft through symposia, exhibitions, and catalogues. The symposia began in November 1990 and will conclude in November 1992.

Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County has implemented a temporary recycling project with Seven-Up/R.C. Bottling Cos., Western Division, and Ecolo-Haul Recycling Services. The project centered on the exhibit *Snoopy: Good*

Grief! He's 40! Because the comic strip character also is A&W's mascot. the company helped promote the exhibit through advertisements. In exchange, the museum gave visitors \$1 off the exhibit's admission price with an empty A&W soda can. Ecolo-Haul lent the containers to store the cans and delivered them to a recycling center free of charge.

Whale Museum in Friday Harbor, Wash., has put the 83 orcas that live in Puget Sound up for "adoption" for a \$35 fee. The Orca Adoption Program allows local residents to support the museum's education and research efforts while giving them full museum benefits and a picture and biography of their whale.

Miami Youth Museum and Fantasy Theatre Factory have formed a partnership for a "Theatre-inthe-Museum" project. The theater will use museum facilities and offer a regular schedule of performances, classes, and workshops for children. It also will develop theatrical programs to complement the museum's schedule of exhibitions and special events.

Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago is producing the first IMAX/OMNIMAX film on Antarctica with major operational support from the National Science Foundation. The film will examine the history, science, ecology, and beauty of Antarctica and will be released internationally in 1991 to coincide with the review of the 30-year-old Antarctic Treaty.

Akron Art Museum in Akron, Ohio, has established the Knight Purchase Award for the acquisition of photographic art by living artists. The award is made possible by a \$300,000 endowment gift from the Knight Foundation.

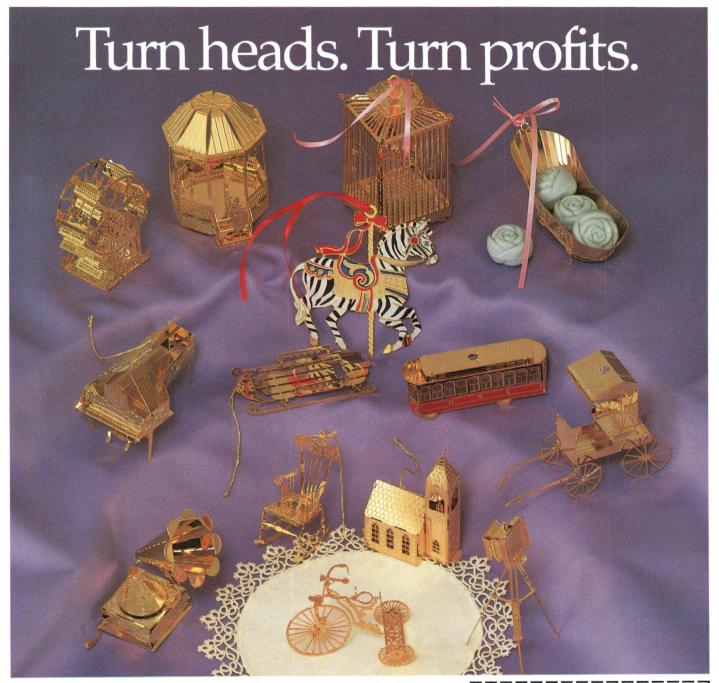
San Antonio Museum of Art has opened the Ewing Halsell Wing, adding more than 7,200 square feet of gallery space to the 55,000-square-foot museum. The wing will house ancient sculpture, ancient glass, and Greek and Roman decorative arts.

Neighbors of American Museum of Natural **History** in New York City have formed Friends of Museum Park, Inc., an organization dedicated to beautifying the museum grounds. Funding for the project will come in part from museum shop sales of a line of gifts conceived by Gary Trudeau, creator of the comic strip Doonesbury (and a museum neighbor).

FRIENDS (USEUM PARK

Neighbors of American Museum of Natural History

Museum News: March/April 1991



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Page 11		
Noteworthy	2	
Letters	7	
M Notes	8	

News and views from around the museum community: Two museums find that all's fare in the war for public visibility; six historical societies interpret life on the Kansas home front during World War II; an unusual grants program pairs artistic excellence and fiscal responsibility; one institution's failure is another's windfall; technology brings sealife up from the ocean and into the aquarium: and our friend Zachary P. Morfogen discusses exhibitions in the making.

Copie	10
International Report	18
By Shirley Glubok	
Sweden's newest museum—which is	

devoted to the 17th-century warship Vasa-

was a work in progress for centuries.

Architecture 21 By Roger K. Lewis

As these examples demonstrate, grafting a "branch" museum onto a mall or office building is delicate work indeed.



Page 29

16

Exhibits 26 Russian America opens up a spare bedroom

in the house of U.S. history—the time during the 18th and 19th centuries when the American northwest was a Russian colony.

Calendar	28
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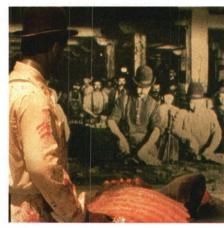
Recent Acquisitions 32

The Shrine to Music Museum in Vermillion, S.D., purchases a Swiss house organ, and the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum in Iowa acquires a Lutheran church and its artifacts.

Exhibit as Canvas 34 By Richard Rabinowitz Intellectual ambition has enormously complicated the task of exhibition planning and design. Now. "conceptual" history museum exhibits are considered works of art that aim to engage visitors by blurring

the lines between object and context.

A Tool for Storytelling 39 By Christopher Chadbourne In some innovative exhibits, "contextual layering" allows the telling of a story within a story without losing the organizational thread.



Page 34

Team Players

44

By Larry Klein Now that designers are fully accepted as members of the exhibition team, they can concentrate on conceptual design—but it wasn't always so . . .

Monologue to Dialogue 46 By James W. Volkert

In the evolution of presenting their collections to the public, museums moved from being bastions of the privileged to participatory institutions. Now they are entering a phase in which exhibits present multiple perspectives and encourage visitors to shape their own experiences.

'Gallery of Discovery' 49 By James Kelly

The Milwaukee Public Museum—the institution that added dioramas to the exhibit vocabulary—now offers visitors a new temporary escape into another world.

Professional Preparation 53 By Jane Bedno

To supplement the current system of learning on the job, graduate-level training programs for museum exhibit designers and planners are making their debut.

Pannla

March/April 1991 Vol. 70, No. 2



Page 49

Facts On File 56 By Suzannah Fabing To alleviate "computer anxiety," curators

should become involved in planning and implementing any collections automation project.

Not Convinced? Read On 60 Here are reasons that might help convince curators of the need to automate.

Fighting for Culture's Turf 61 By Charles Alan Watkins Buffeted by the actions of theme parks and

other "masqueraders," museums now are struggling to exercise interpretive domain over their traditional subject matter.

67 **Special Section** Forces of Change By Georgianna Contiguglia Like Denver's city builders, museums today

must look at change as opportunity.

Special Section

Deliberating in Denver By Nina G. Taylor Museum colleagues will debate the issues and take advantage of professional services

70 **Special Section** List of Exhibitors

at AAM's 86th annual meeting, May 19-23.

76 The Law By Richard Meltzer Thanks to Congress (and a temporary tax break), 1991 could prove to be a banner year for museums.

79 **Book Review** By Gary Kulik An assistant director at the National Museum of American History reviews Highbrow/ Lowbrow and Curators and Culture.

83 Marketplace

On the cover: An apogee of exhibit design in an art museum, Treasure Houses of Britain in 1985-86 fabricated the domestic settings of 500 years of British collecting. Photograph courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



Page 53

68

Buying Power

85

By Steven Weintraub and Gordon Anson UV filters can neutralize an invisible enemy.

Almanac

In 1946, museums considered a global path.

Government Relations 90 By Geoffrey Platt Jr.

Even in wartime, museums must keep up the good fight for government support.

92 **Your Vantage Point** You agree: A new era of museum/Native American cooperation is beginning.

Index to Advertisers 94

Photo Credits 95

96 From the Director

By Edward H. Able Jr. Here's one way to benefit from the best our profession has to offer.

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LETTERS

Concerning Quagmires . . .

To the Editor:

Make the Right Move (November/December 1990) is an extremely useful and provocative analysis of the museum director search process from the perspective of candidates investigating opportunities in the field. Although its negative characterization of the current state of institutional life is debatable, it is a significant contribution to the serial literature treating the governance and management of museums.

As those of us who have been involved in the search process well know, it is frequently imperfect, unpredictable, and unsettling, yet it encourages much constructive institutional, as well as personal, soul searching and planning. Those surveying directorship options, particularly at what the author terms "quagmire" museums, would do well to do their homework before becoming actively committed as candidates.

It is reassuring to note, however, that search practices are taking on a growing sophistication. Whatever their state of health may be, America's museums are becoming more professional in the way they select future leadership, and the entire field only stands to benefit.

Bryant F. Tolles Jr.
Director
Museum Studies Program
University of Delaware
Newark, Del.

To the Editor:

I have performed audits of museums for several years and must take exception to a portion of the *Make the Right Move* article. If the institution's bookkeeper is incompetent or the internal procedures so bad as to disguise an error of great size, then the auditor is not doing his job, and the museum is not receiving the service it deserves or is paying the auditor for.

Problems of a financial nature should be located and brought to management's attention by the auditor. The format of the audited financial statements should not look unfamiliar to museum professionals, because most auditors use as a guideline the financial statement illustrations in the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants' Audit and Accounting Guide "Audits of Certain Non-Profit Organizations."

Glenn E. Lacina Johnson, Ewing, Hinojosa, Cron and Co. P.C. McAllen, Texas

Architectural Ego?

To the Editor:

I was disappointed in *In the U.S. and Beyond, Museums Enter the Age of Aquariums* (September/October 1990). The article omits the problems associated with producing architectural gems that fail to meet the needs of live collections or visitors. In short, while looks may serve the architectural ego, they have little to do with creating effective cultural institutions.

Barbara A. Birney Visitor Research and Exhibit Evaluation Brookfield Zoo Brookfield, Ill.



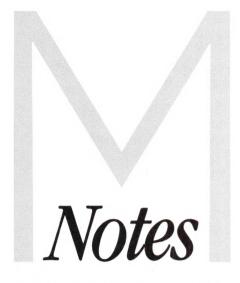
In the War for Public Visibility, Two Museums Find that All's Fare

Two one-day projects intended to enlist taxicab drivers in serving as museum ambassadors-at-large have reaped a windfall of publicity for the Art Institute of Chicago and the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C. Picking up an Associated Press news story about the Chicago event, newspaper editors from Denton, Texas, to Manchester, N.H., crafted headlines such as "Here's the Museum; Don't Forget the Tip" and "Cabbies and Cubism."

With financial and catering support from Sara Lee Corp., the Art Institute designated September 26, 1990, Taxi Day, when the Windy City's taxi and limousine drivers were invited to partake of a continental breakfast in the museum's Stock Exchange Room and view the exhibition From Poussin to Matisse: The Russian Taste for French Painting, which was sponsored by Sara Lee. The idea: Let cabbies know what is happening at the Art Institute so they can pass the word to curious out-of-towners. Radio dispatchers spread word of the event among hackers, who responded enthusiastically to the invitation.

More than a hundred cabbies dropped by. Some only stopped for the free Danish, but others took the time to view the 51 French masterpieces on loan from the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad and the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow. They were not charged the normal \$6 admission charge and had the galleries all to themselves.

Art Institute planners say they are pleased with the results of the experiment involving a group of locals who deliver large numbers of visitors to



their doors but seldom come inside.

Meanwhile, while hackers in Chicago were feasting on pastries and French painting, their counterparts in Washington, D.C., also were enticed to visit a museum—this time in an effort to overcome one of the problems besetting the National Museum of American Art.

Museum officials say many people, including taxi drivers, do not know where the museum is located. Most mistakenly assume that like many other museums with the word "national" in their name, the American Art museum flanks the national Mall, either on Constitution or Independence avenues. In fact, the museum has been in residence at the former Patent Office Building for the past 22 years at the corner of Eighth and G streets Northwest.

The decision to rectify this pervasive misapprehension came from the museum's director, Betsy Broun, who noted that a mistake was made even on the map of the city's acclaimed rapid transit system, Metro. Often, she reports, potential visitors are dropped off by cabbies at the National Museum of American History. So Broun invited taxi drivers to stop by on September 15 for a free box lunch and a museum souvenir-an air freshener, with the museum's address on the back, shaped in the form of Luis Jimenez's fiberglass sculpture Vaquero, which also graces the museum entrance.

At the end of a three-hour period, nearly 400 cabbies had taken up the offer and were welcomed by the

museum's docents, who also coaxed a few to pose for snapshots.

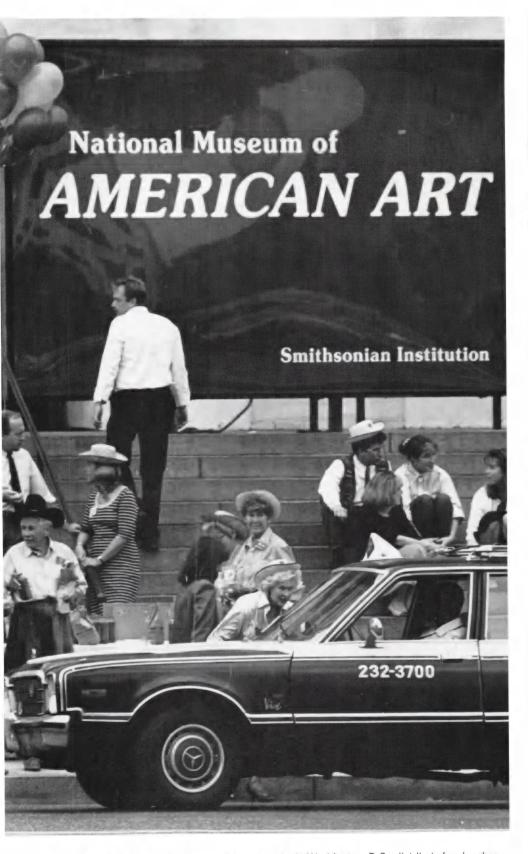
Bertram E. Barton, of Comfort Cab 197, summed it up for *The Washington Post* this way: "I know the museum has been here for a while, but I didn't know the name. I'll remember it now for sure."

Six Historical Societies in Kansas Interpret the WW II Home Front

Collaborative projects are no cinch to pull off. But for small institutions, they can provide one welcome solution to a common two-part problem—lack of both financial and interpretive resources. Claudia Finley, who as assistant director of the Reno County Historical Society in Kansas is serving as project manager for one such effort, wrote *Museum News* recently with the story of how a collaborative project in her state is enabling six local historical societies to interpret the World War II home front in their counties. She writes:

Researching and Interpreting World War II and the Kansas Home Front brought together six Kansas historical societies and is assisting them in preparing for the 50th anniversary of the U.S. entry into World War II. The collaboration affords small museums the opportunity to work with people who can offer specific advice on individual concerns. Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the project is cosponsored by the Ray E. and Stella Dillon Foundation and Reno County's historical society in Hutchinson, Kan.

The project's goals are to establish a network between institutions with similar challenges and limited resources and allow each to build upon the others' ideas; to encourage each



Volunteers at the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C., distribute free lunches to cabbies in an attempt to make them more aware of the museum's not-on-the-Mall location.

institution to examine and evaluate its collections for gaps in portraying its county's role during World War II; to assist each historical society in design-

ing exhibits and programming around the theme of the World War II home front; and to help each institution develop proposals to national, state, lo-

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cal, or private granting agencies for project funding.

Each institution committed a team of four members, a hybrid of museum professionals and volunteers, to participate in a series of five monthly training seminars. The first month, humanists discussed American military history, the role of women during the war, the American home front, and the Kansas home front. The following four seminars were technical in nature, covering local history research, oral history research, publishing and editing local history, and exhibiting local history. Informal round table sessions followed each seminar.

A panel review concluded the seminar series. Three humanists returned to meet with each team and discuss the institution's program and exhibit plans. Panelists also critiqued applications to granting institutions, offering suggestions to strengthen the proposals.

The exhibits and programs now being developed vary from site to site, but each is implementing many, including reading and discussion programs and a film series featuring 1940s cartoons and movies. Institutions in Johnson County and Republic County are designing permanent exhibitions; other participants are designing temporary displays. One—the Riley County Historical Society—plans to turn its historic Wolf-Butterfield house into a wartime household.

Although collaborative projects are becoming increasingly popular with foundations and granting agencies (they involve a variety of people and geographic areas and provide much exposure for each dollar spent), they have other advantages as well. In this situation, collaboration has resulted in small institutions getting historical and technical information they otherwise would do without. By developing the same theme and working toward the same goals, they are building mutually beneficial relationships that we expect will provide long-term benefits.

This Grant Program Pairs Artistic Excellence and Fiscal Responsibility

With economic trials challenging cultural institutions of all types and sizes, there is some welcome news for

15 New York City African-American, Latino, and Asian-American arts organizations. The Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs have nominated the institutions to participate in a program that will assist their long-term development.

Officially designated the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Arts Stabilization Initiative, the project's goal is to improve the financial stability of the organizations by providing financial management assistance and grants of as much as \$1 million.

The cultural organizations—including Bronx Museum of the Arts, El Museo del Barrio, Jamaica Arts Center, Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, and Studio Museum in Harlem — were nominated on criteria established by the National Arts Stabilization Fund. The criteria include artistic achievements and leadership in addition to such financial considerations as annual operating budget and net current deficit. The organizations also must have been in continuous operation for the past five years.

Fund president Marcia T. Thompson says, "We commend the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund for making this initiative possible and providing an opportunity for these organizations to demonstrate that fiscal responsibility and artistic excellence are not only compatible but mutually sustaining."

Nomination alone does not guarantee a grant award. Organizations must first complete the qualification process, which involves a thorough financial examination and analysis as well as an organizational self-evaluation, culminating in a comprehensive plan that addresses the institution's long-term budgetary priorities.

The grants are designed to strengthen the organizations' capital bases. During the first year of the grant term, the funds can be used to eliminate as much as 50 percent of the net current deficit. The grants also are designed to establish a revolving working capital reserve with four annual installments paid over five years. The organizations must meet financial performance targets, however, to receive the additional grant installments.

Fax 625-4784

The Stabilization Initiative is a joint venture administered by the National Arts Stabilization Fund, which has been involved in similar projects in Boston, Kansas City, and Seattle.

In New York, One Institution's Failure Is Another's Windfall

A 150-year-old bank's demise has become a New York museum's windfall.

The Seamen's Bank for Savings, whose history mirrored that of New York as a leading seaport, failed last April and its assets were taken over by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. (F.D.I.C.). The Chase Manhattan Bank bought the Seamen's Bank's deposits and began operating the insolvent bank's 13 branches. But cash wasn't the Seamen's Bank's only asset.

The F.D.I.C. also assumed the bank's collection of more than 2,000 objects that record New York's rich maritime history. The F.D.I.C., seeking to raise cash to pay off the bank's creditors, wasn't quite sure what to do with the collection, which includes oil paintings, prints and drawings, models of ships, and scrimshaw. The bank's failure had barely been announced when the South Street Seaport Museum stepped forward.

"We had known about the collection for many years, although we had seen very little of it. Some of the paintings were hung in the bank's corporate offices, some in [the bank's] branches," said Peter Neill, the museum's president. "They had been collecting for more than 150 years. . . . We knew it was the preeminent private maritime collection in the country."

On the day the F.D.I.C. announced it was closing the bank, Neill called the federal agency to ask about the disposition of the collection. "They were probably pleased I called," he said. "They weren't sure what to do with it all.

"My first impression was that they couldn't sell it to us. I proposed that the museum manage the collection for the government, but that idea didn't fly," Neill said. What Neill feared most was that the F.D.I.C. would eventually auction off the collection, piece by piece.

Neill began contacting members of New York State's congressional dele-



For details, circle #30 on the reply card.



This painting of New York harbor is from the South Street Seaport Museum's new collection.

gation to seek their support in obtaining or managing the collection, and he began writing letters to the F.D.I.C. to persuade the agency that the public interest would be served if the collec-

tion were kept intact and administered by a museum such as his, whose mission is to tell the story of New York's maritime history.

"It was clear that they weren't go-

ing to give it away," Neill said. "They had to maximize their return."

After weeks of discussions, the South Street Seaport Museum and the F.D.I.C. negotiated an arrangement in which the museum would have the exclusive right to bid for the entire collection. The F.D.I.C. had the collection appraised by two auction houses, and the museum did its own appraisal. The museum bid \$3.4 million, and the F.D.I.C. accepted it in early November.

The museum's work was hardly over. The F.D.I.C. and the museum arranged to complete the sale by early February, giving the museum barely two months to raise the money. As this article was written in January, the museum had received pledges of \$2 million and had made arrangements for a loan to buy the collection, in case all \$3.4 million had not been raised, Neill said.

And what will the museum get for that sum? A spectacular cornucopia of maritime art and artifacts, most of them concerning New York City, including oil paintings of ships, a figure

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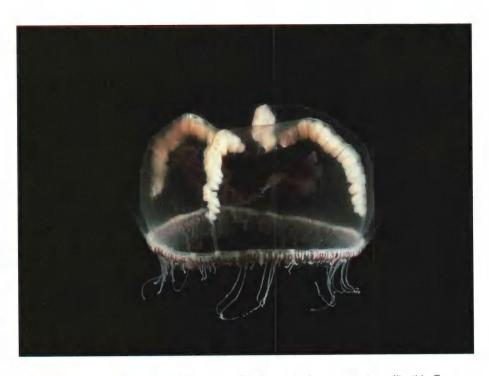
Corporate Affiliate Member of American Association of Museums and Sustaining Member of Association of Science-Technology Centers head, ephemera such as "clipper cards" (which are colorful hand bills), numerous prints, drawings, and scrimshaw. One particularly prized object is a sailor's violin with a scrimshawed finger board, "a remarkable artifact," said Neill.

Neill said the collection is a "perfect fit" for the museum. Its strength has been its collection of ships, which Neill says is the largest in the world. The ships are docked on the East River, next to the seaport, which is a collection of restored 19th-century commercial buildings in lower Manhattan. But the museum's collection of fine art, particularly paintings, has been, Neill confessed, "deficient."

"In one giant leap our fine arts collection will go from mediocre to exceptional," he said.

Technology Brings Sealife Up from The Ocean and Into the Aquarium

Visitors to the Monterey Bay Aquarium now can witness the wonders of nearby ocean life without donning scuba gear and wet suits.

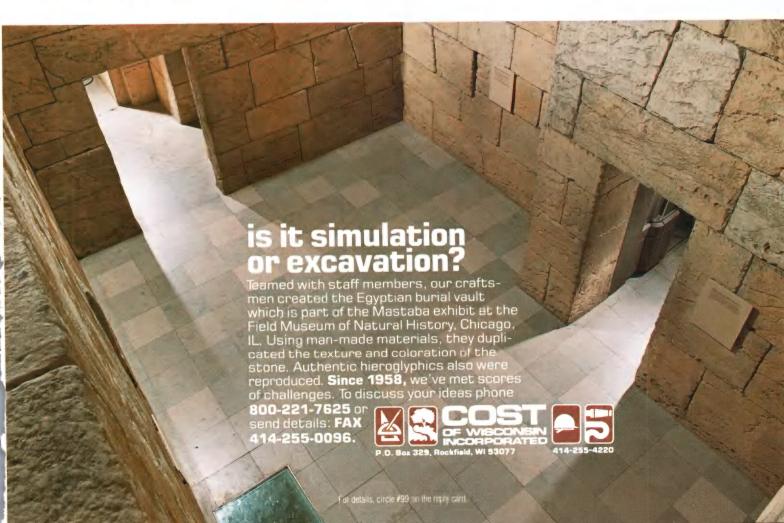


Live museum broadcasts from below Monterey Bay feature underwater creatures like this *Tema*.

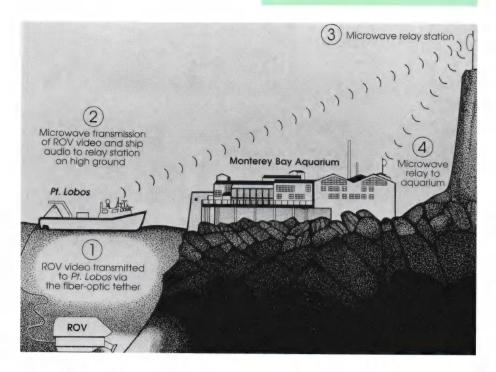
Live from the Deep Canyon brings real-time oceanographic investigation conducted by the California aquarium's research institute into the auditorium, where computer technology

opens up many educational possibilities. A live video broadcast sends pictures of animals and flora from 3,000 feet below the surface of the bay.

According to Mark Shelley, presi-



M NOTES



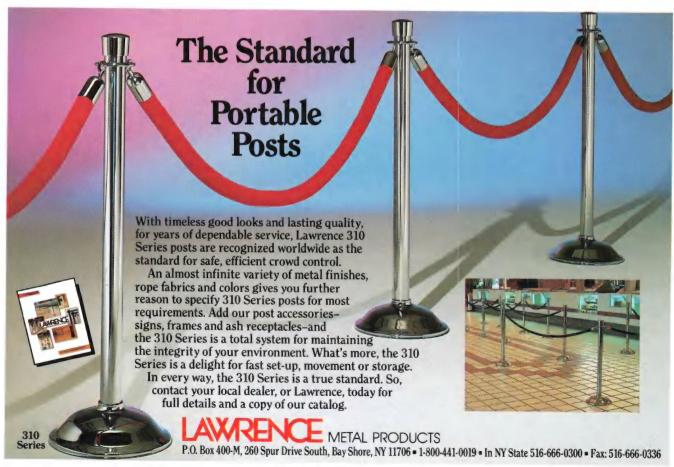
Transmitting from under the bay to the aquarium's auditorium requires innovative technology.

dent of the exhibit design firm Sea Studios, "Specialized video cameras mounted outside a remotely operated submersible transmit images via a 1,500-meter fiber optic tether to the in-

stitute's research ship. Pilots on board the ship control the movement of the submersible and its cameras. Images they see in the ship's control room are transmitted by microwave to a relay station on top of a local mountain peak. The microwave signal is then beamed to a satellite dish at the aquarium, where it is routed to a video projector in the aquarium's auditorium."

Along with monitoring the live image of the submersible's explorations, the aquarium audience also can follow changes in measurements of water temperature, depth, and salinity as the remote ocean vehicle ventures into new stretches of the submarine canyon. Steve Webster, the aquarium's director of education, says, "Every single trip, they find something new, some animal that no one has seen before. It's exciting for us to be able to share these voyages with visitors."

The thrill, however, is not limited to passive observation of the televised images. An interactive component involves educators interpreting what is seen on the screen with the help of a visual encyclopedia on a laser disc controlled from an electronic podium. By touching the computer screen, the aquarium biologist in charge can alternate between live footage and the encyclopedia, which contains video seg-



ments and still photographs pertaining to more than 180 animals, habitats, people, and pieces of equipment used in underwater research. Supplemental and explanatory notes appear on the computer screen that assist the educator in answering questions about the projected marine images and oceanographic technology.

The intent: Visitors to the Monterey Bay Aquarium should leave with some understanding and appreciation of the work being done at the research institute testing new technologies for studying the chemistry, biology, and geology of the deep sea.

Here's Some of What You Have to Look Forward To

Our friend Zachary P. Morfogen, consultant and publisher of an arts newsletter, once again sends *Museum News* readers word of upcoming museum exhibitions:

- The Trust for Museum Exhibitions in Washington, D.C., will circulate Encountering the New World: A Columbus Quincentennial Celebration from the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University during 1992.
- Looking forward to 1996, when Atlanta will host the Olympic Games, the city's High Museum of Art is preparing *The Measure of All Things*, an art exhibition focusing on the human quest for identity.
- The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York are organizing for late 1992 and early 1993 the exhibition *The Still Life Paintings of William Harnett*, featuring 50 of the 19th-century painter's works.
- San Diego Museum of Art is planning a national tour of California artwork donated to the museum by Frederick R. Weisman.
- The Art of Looking: John Ruskin and the Victorian Eye is being organized by the Phoenix Art Museum for 1993. After its Arizona venue, the show will travel.
- Indianapolis's National Art Museum of Sport will open *Spirit of America* in winter 1993 and then organize a tour. □

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PEOPLE

Barbara Joans to director, Vera Mae Fredrickson to projects coordinator, and Leslie Fleming to projects assistant, Merritt Museum of Anthropology, Oakland, Calif.



Ann R. Leven to deputy treasurer, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Billie K. Bailey to director, Grout Museum of History and Science, Waterloo, Iowa.

Kathryn K. Matthew to director, New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science, Albuquerque, N.M.



Steven Newsome to director, Anacostia Museum, Washington, D.C.

Paul Storch to objects conservator, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minn.

James W. Bradley to director, Robert S. Peabody Museum, Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass.

David C. Levy to president and director, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Jean Willoughby Ashton to library director, New-York Historical Society, New York.

Susan Longhenry to curator of education, Georgia Museum of Art, Athens, Ga.



Jaquelyn R. Kitzelman to program development director, Museum of Outdoor Arts, Englewood, Colo.

Priscilla Stratten to operations manager, and Rachel Lerner to information officer and membership coordinator, David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago.

Stephen Fleischman to director, Madison Art Center, Madison, Wis.



Victor D. Simmons to staff lecturer, Art Institute of Chicago.

Susan Jackson to site director and education coordinator, Historic Camden, S.C.

Claudia J. Nicholson to curator of collections, Robinson State Museum, South Dakota Historical Society, Pierre, S.D.

Preston Metcalf to curator of education, Lisa Ramirez to assistant curator, Carol Carnoy to education assistant, and Clarissa Welsh Petriceks to public relations/membership coordinator, Triton Museum of Art, Santa Clara, Calif.



Alan L. Hankin to associate director of programs and exhibits, New England Aquarium, Boston.

Timothy C. Novak to curator/coordinator, MSC Forsyth Center Galleries, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas.

Keith L. Barr to director, Peoria Historical Society, Peoria, Ill.

John Greene to education director, Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.



Trish Thompson to carator of education, Museum of Arts and Sciences, Daytona Beach, Fla.

Goéry Delacôte to director, Exploratorium, San Francisco.

Gerry Riggs to exhibition coordinator, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, Colorado Springs, Colo.

Anne W. Ackerson to director, Rensselaer County Historical Society, Troy, N.Y.

Kathy Halbreich to director, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

Ronni Baer to associate curator of European art, High Museum of Art, Atlanta. David W. Hennage to vice president for administration, L. Stephen Bishop to director of Omnimax exhibition and distribution, and Gerald M. Hubbard to director of facilities, Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago.

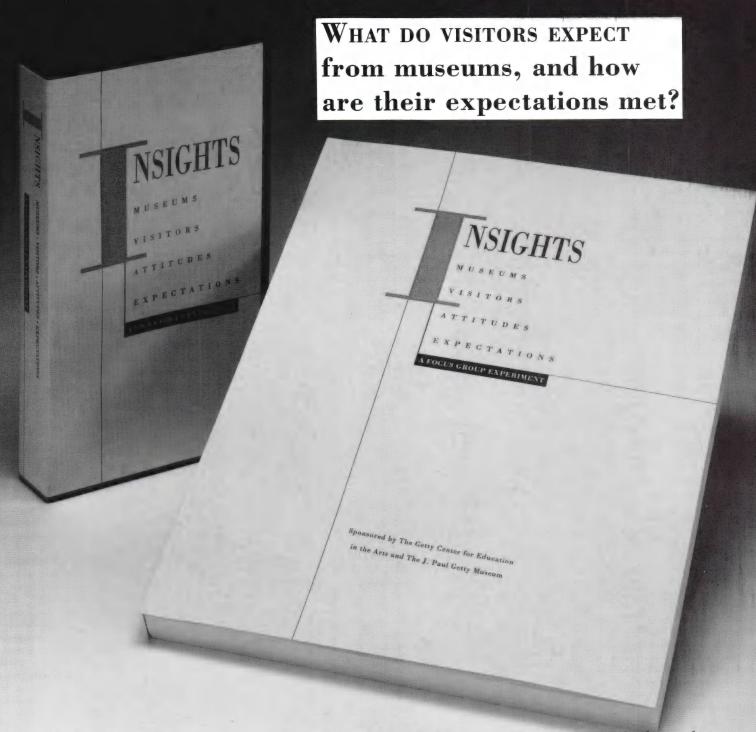
Anne Isenhower to marketing and communications assistant, Atlanta Historical Society, Atlanta.

James Moznette to associate director for external affairs, and **Steven C. Brown** to assistant curator of Native American art, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle.



Edward J. Nygren to curator of art collections, Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, Calif. □

Please send personnel information to Nina G. Taylor, Editorial Assistant, Museum News, AAM, 1225 Eye St. N.W., Suite 200, Washington, D.C. 20005.



Insights: Museums, Visitors,
Attitudes, and Expectations
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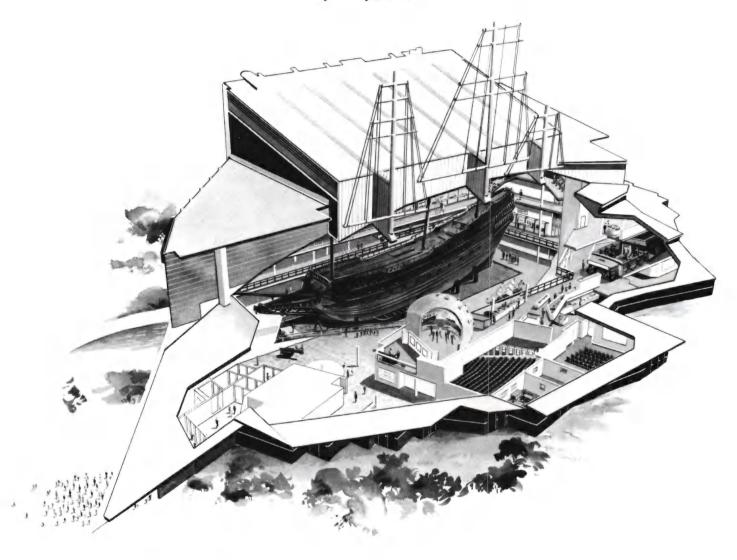
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Sweden's Newest Museum Was a Work in Progress for Centuries

By Shirley Glubok



Recovered from her watery grave after more than 300 years, the restored man-of-war Vasa now is on display in her own museum in Stockholm.

he man-of-war *Vasa*, the ill-fated pride of the Swedish Navy that lay on the floor of Stockholm harbor for more than 300 years, now sits under a dramatic golden copper roof rising above the trees of Stockholm's Djurgården, a park that was once the royal hunting preserve. The *Vasa* Museum is Scandinavia's newest, but it tells a story that harkens back centuries.

That story began in 1625, when King Gustavas II ordered the building of a man-of-war to strengthen his

Shirley Glubok is a free-lance writer in New York and a lecturer at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. fleet in the Baltic. The vessel, covered with gilded and painted wood sculpture, including a bust of the young king and the royal coat-of-arms, was three-masted and carried 10 sails and 64 bronze guns. More than a thousand oaks were felled for her construction, and 400 men were hired to build her.

Her dramatic launching came three

years later on a clear Sunday afternoon in early August, when she set out for a short pleasure trip with 150 on board. Music filled the air as thousands assembled along the shore of Stockholm harbor. After a salute was fired, a powerful gust blew suddenly. The *Vasa* began to heel, and then she righted herself. Then a more powerful gust, and she heeled again, tilting so far over that water gushed into the open, lower gun ports. The warship went over on her side and sank, taking 50 passengers with her.

The vessel's captain, Söfring Hansson, narrowly escaped the disaster and soon was imprisoned and interrogated at the Royal Castle. The Royal Court wanted to know if he had been drinking, but it determined that neither Hansson nor any members of his crew was intoxicated. Captain Hansson maintained that the sinking was caused by deficient construction: The ship was top-heavy, with tall masts and massive guns, each of which weighed a ton. The *Vasa* needed twice as much ballast, but there was not enough space in the hold.

Thirty-six years later, a group of adventurers, using a primitive diving bell, salvaged all but 11 of the ship's 64 guns. After that, she lay untouched for more than three centuries.

In 1953, Anders Franzen, a Swedish engineer with a passion for naval warfare, started searching for the *Vasa*, beginning in the archives, where a number of documents relating to the warship were preserved. Once Franzen determined the general location, divers dragged Stockholm harbor. After three years, one of the divers came up with a plug of blackened oak; a few days later, divers found the *Vasa*, approximately 110 feet below the surface.

With the assistance of the Swedish Navy, salvage divers dug tunnels under the ship's hull so cables could be laid to raise her. A nationwide "Save the Vasa" campaign was started to pay for raising the 12,000-ton ship, which was larger and older than any other vessel ever raised. The plan was to lift her to the surface in stages while towing her little by little into shallower water. The Vasa finally



As depicted in this watercolor by Björn Landström, the *Vasa* fires a salute before capsizing on her maiden voyage in 1628.

broke the surface in 1961, was pumped out and then floated into a dock at Beckholmen. There, she was mounted on a concrete pontoon and



INTERNATIONAL REPORT

covered by a huge aluminum shelter.

Senior archaeologist Per Lundström set to work registering each object found on board. Everything, including mast and sails, had to be preserved; conservation continued for 20 years. The wood was treated and the rusted bolts replaced. A temporary preserving shop, to treat the wood, was set up; an automatic spraying device was installed, producing a thick mist to prevent the hull from drying too quickly. While she was being preserved, visitors could see the Vasa in her temporary quarters. It became the most popular museum attraction in Scandinavia, with more than 11 million visitors viewing the work in progress. Eventually, the entire ship was rebuilt and refurnished with original decorations in place.

Meanwhile, work began in 1987 on a spacious concrete and copper building to house the boat. The design by Swedish architects Göran Månsson and Marianne Dahlbäck was chosen from 364 competition entries. What makes the structure particularly interesting is how it was built: In Decem-

ber 1988, the *Vasa* was towed into place in the Galär, a former naval yard, and the museum building was built around her. The new museum opened in summer 1990.

Exhibits along the Vasa museum's galleries tell of the ship's origin and sinking, her discovery and salvaging, the carvers of the ornamentation, life in 17th-century Sweden, and the barsh conditions of life at sea

To preserve the boat, humidity at the facility is kept between 57 and 60 percent and the temperature between 17 and 20 degrees Celsius. Entry is on a level with the ship's original water line, where the flooring is cobblestone

to suggest a quay. There are galleries on seven levels, where visitors can study the ship from various angles and examine the carvings.

Exhibits along the galleries tell of the ship's origin and sinking, its discovery and salvaging, the master carvers of the ornamentation, life in 17th-century Sweden, and the harsh conditions of life at sea. Visitors also can step onto a reconstruction of the gun deck and experience the feeling of being aboard.

Many artifacts are exhibited, including 4,000 coins (most of them copper) and a seaman's chest that never had been unpacked (containing clothing and a hat). A senior officer's cabin is richly furnished with pewter, glass, and china tableware; medical equipment includes such items as wooden ladles, a mortar, a pillbox, and a pewter flask.

Additionally, to help people understand why the *Vasa* capsized, a computer terminal enables visitors to "sail" the ship, testing her stability. With another program, it is possible to move around inside the *Vasa*, exploring her historic nooks and crannies.



Grafting a 'Branch' Museum Onto A Mall or Office Is Delicate Work

By Roger K. Lewis

ith commercial property vacancy rates on the rise in many American cities and suburbs, and with commercial developers and owners always in need of special events or magnetic attractions to increase visits by potential customers, some museums are finding new opportunities by establishing satellite galleries.

This is not a new idea. Several successful efforts have been made to transport art from the traditional museum out into the everyday, intensely populated, more commercial world.

The Rouse Co., primarily a shopping center developer, has its "Art in the Marketplace" program, established in 1977 to bring community "cultural institutions and artists to the marketplace." Last year it received a grant

Roger K. Lewis, FAIA, is an architect and professor of architecture at the University of Maryland. He writes an architecture column for The Washington Post.

from the National Endowment for the Arts to further such efforts.

The Whitney Museum of American Art has four branch museums, three in Manhattan and one in Fairfield County, Conn., all the result of mutually beneficial deals struck with corporate partners and hosts to make outreach affordable. The Wall Street branch was the first, opening in 1973 with the support of the Lower Manhattan business

The sculpture court of the Whitney Museum's branch at Philip Morris headquarters in New York aims to bring art to where people are.



ARCHITECTURE



Atlanta's High Museum of Art places part of its collection in the downtown Georgia-Pacific Center.

community; this branch moved later into 3,200 square feet of space in Park Tower Realty's building at Federal Reserve Plaza. In 1981, Champion International Corp. gave 3,600 square feet to the museum in its new headquarters building in Stamford. Thanks to the largesse of the Philip Morris Co., the Whitney created a 1,100-square-foot gallery, plus a 5,200-square-foot sculpture court, at the company's eastside headquarters in 1983. And in 1986, the Equitable Life Assurance Society provided the museum's fourth and biggest branch, two 3,000-square-foot galleries flanking the atrium lobby of Equitable's new westside headquarters building.

In Atlanta, the High Museum of Art opened its first branch in 1986 in the Georgia-Pacific Center, a downtown office building project developed by a joint venture of Georgia-Pacific and the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., which also built the museum facility. Operating funds come from the Fulton County Arts Council. Occupying almost 5,000 square feet on two levels connected by ramps within a long sliver of vertical space, the gallery is topped by a vaulted ceiling allowing controlled daylight to filter in. The project, designed by Scogin, Elam and Bray, received an A.I.A. national design award in 1988.

The Kansas City Museum recently established a downtown satellite—



or Andrew Robertson



The World of Coca-Cola

Documenting a 104-year history with nearly 1000 artifacts relating to Coca-Cola, the exhibitions were designed by Staples & Charles Ltd and fabricated by Exhibits Unlimited, Inc.

containing some 6,000 square feetlocated on the third floor of a multilevel retail shopping complex at the base of the city's second tallest office building, the 38-story Town Pavilion. The branch is dedicated to large-scale traveling exhibits on history, science, and technology, plus portions of the museum's own collections. The museum's primary facility, Corinthian Hall, a 52-room mansion remote from downtown, rarely drew more than 100,000 visitors each year. With the opening of the downtown satellite in 1988, annual attendance has reached 250,000, elevating the museum from the 19th to the sixth most popular attraction in Kansas City. Much of this is attributable to the appeal of museum programs-such as Dinosaurs Alivewhich draw families with children from all over the region who might otherwise never set foot in a museum. And popular exhibits have provided a welcome boost for Town Pavilion's merchants as well.

Of course, when museums open branches in easily accessible, rentable spaces of retail shopping centers or office buildings, critical architectural issues arise.

An appropriate location offering good public visibility and accessibility—coupled with the symbiotic presence of other commercial, recreational, or cultural activities—is essential if the museum satellite's presence is to be felt. But equally important, even leasable spaces provided at no cost must prove to be suitable for exhibition purposes. Among the primary considerations:

- Size and configuration. Is the space available large enough and appropriately shaped for whatever functions—public entry and control, exhibition, curatorial preparation and conservation, storage, research, administration, museum shop—are envisioned? Ceiling height may be the most limiting spatial factor in many circumstances.
- Lighting. Can a proper exhibition lighting system be installed? Electric power distribution and capacity must be verified. Sometimes a building's electrical service must be beefed up if unforeseen electrical loads are introduced.

■ Climate control. How well does the building's heating, ventilating, and air conditioning system satisfy the environmental needs of the museum branch? Are there other building tenants who introduce pollutants (greasy french fry exhaust comes to mind) into the building's interior atmosphere that could damage artwork? An independent mechanical system may be needed to control temperature and humidity within the museum's space.

Creating a satisfactory
museum satellite is costly,
both for construction and
operation. So willing
and financially capable
sponsors—corporations,
individuals, governmental
and cultural
organizations—must be in
for the long haul

■ Security. Can the space be adequately controlled when open to visitors and thoroughly secured when closed? More is at issue than lockable doors and alarm systems. Enclosing walls, floors, and ceilings of tenant spaces may be easily broken through or have concealed penetrations. They should be inspected and, if necessary, reinforced to discourage intruders.

Creating an architecturally satisfactory museum satellite is obviously a costly undertaking, both for construction and for ongoing operation and maintenance. Therefore, willing and financially capable sponsors—corporations, individuals, governmental and cultural organizations—must be in for the long haul. It's not enough just to have free space.

As more museums create satellites and reach new audiences by becoming tenants in the commercial market-place, those who stand to benefit—museums, landlords, merchants—ultimately will need to consider the options carefully.



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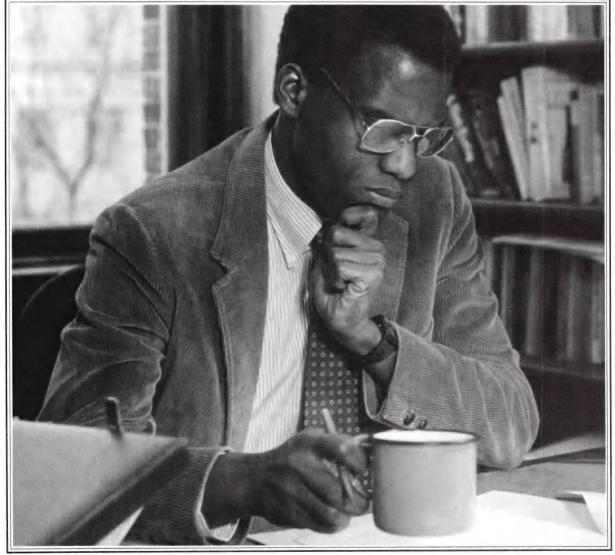
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THE SUBJECT IS MORE THAN ACADEMIC.

Opening Up a Spare Bedroom in The House of U.S. History



In 1818, Mikhail T. Tikhanov painted An Inhabitant of the Copper River in North America.

Russian America: The Forgotten Frontier

When David Nicandri, director of the Washington State Historical Society, saw the Arts Festival lineup of the 1990 Goodwill Games—another chapter in the continuing saga of Soviet-U.S. cooperation—he noticed one significant omission: There was no discussion of the 18th and 19th-century contact between the two neighbors, whose land masses almost touch in the icy regions of the North Pacific. The perfect complement to the flagship exhibition Moscow: Treasures and Traditions, he believed, would be an exploration of that time in American history when the Northwest was a Russian colony, a little studied and barely known episode kept in the closet by half a century of ideological hostility and mutual suspicion.

With the assistance of a National Endowment for the Humanities grant and an unprecedented fund-raising effort, the resulting exhibition, Russian America: The Forgotten Frontier, debuted in Tacoma last July, having pooled the resources and expertise of the Washington State museum and the Anchorage Museum of History and Art. While the Alaskan museum served as principal organizer, manager of the exhibit, and borrower of record, its partner undertook fund-raising and logistical arrangements. Invited to curate the exhibition: Barbara Sweetland Smith, a historian who has made the Russian presence in North America her specialty.

Because neither organizing museum had much material pertaining to the story line of *Russian America*, Smith did not know at the outset whether she would have 50 or 500 works to display once the show opened. (In the end, the second figure was reached—satisfying those museum colleagues who feared she would put a preponderance of letters, documents, and words on the walls and asked at the end of each week what the object count was.) Four-fifths of the objects resulted from exhaustive contacts made with 56 museums, archives, and individuals in the U.S.

To counter several prevailing misconceptions of the Russian colonization of North America, Smith organized the exhibition's storyline around three principal points: "First," says Smith, "we wanted to demonstrate that the Russian colonial experience was essentially different from other colonial occupations in North America, particularly after the first haphazard and ungoverned exploration led by groups of commercial companies of promysblenniki or fur trappers. . . . After the Russian Imperial Navy took over administration of the colony in 1819, treatment of the native peoples inhabiting the region became remarkably humane for the time, with the introduction of bilingual education, public health programs, retirement communities for Russian colonists not wishing to return to the motherland, and an educational system run through the Orthodox Church."

A second point the exhibition makes relates to the residual effects of the Russian legacy not only in Alaska (where it is most pronounced) but along the Northwest coast as far south as northern California.

The third goal of the exhibition, and one with obvious contemporary appeal in today's climate of U.S.-Soviet joint ventures, maintains that the normal relationship between Russia and the U.S. is one of economic cooperation, going back to the last decade of the 18th century.

To put flesh on this tripartite narrative structure, Smith traveled to the Soviet Union, whose museums in Moscow and Leningrad preserve extensive holdings of Russian-American material culture. Because Russian exploration of North America occurred at a time of enlightenment (as opposed to the earlier Spanish invasion, when no attempts were made to preserve or document the new lands and peoples traumatically subjected to European domination), the historical record in physical form lives on in the vast storage areas of Soviet museums.

Interestingly, just as the Cold War has distorted the U.S. picture of Russian America to one of unbridled cruelty, so too the Soviets have largely suppressed this chapter of Russian history, especially because it ended with the embarrassing sale of the now-known-to-be-resource-rich territory in 1867 for a mere \$7.2 million. The cancelled check from the transaction is

one of the exhibition's highlights.

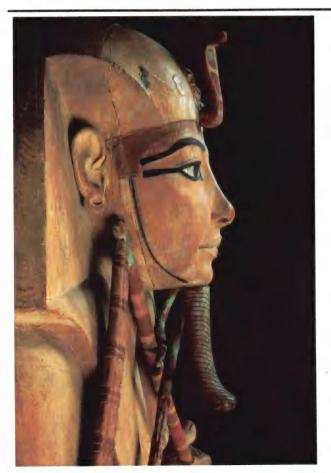
According to Smith, "a surprising number of administrators of Russian America were scientists, people who had made names for themselves as explorers and writers. They saw as one of their duties the documentation and collection for return to Russia of examples of native culture in every form imaginable. Many brought with them skilled artists, whose depictions of daily life among the Aleuts and Tlingit parallel in significance the paintings of Carl Bodmer, recorder of Indian life elsewhere in North America."

Smith had the good fortune to be in the Soviet Union at a propitious time and thus was able to obtain 22 watercolors of one such artist, Mikhail T. Tikhanov. An earlier exhibition mounted by the Smithsonian Institution, *Crossroads of Continents*, had to suffice with reproductions—further demonstrating the extent of Soviet-U.S. harmony.

The same open atmosphere paved the way for Soviet museum professionals to act as couriers escorting the large number of loaned objects. Smith says all the Soviets who have seen the exhibition, as well as those who attended a major symposium on the subject in Anchorage, expressed wonder at what they saw on this part of their history.

At first, Smith says she feared as a historian that the exhibition would have to simplify and distort a complex story to make it accessible to a non-scholarly audience. But the reaction so far in Washington and Alaska—among the general and academic populations—has been enthusiastic. For all involved, *Russian America* represents a spare bedroom in the house of history kept shut for decades, whose riches now are being dusted off and exposed to light.

Russian America: The Forgotten Frontier closed at the Anchorage museum in February. Its travels continue as follows: May 3–September 22, 1991: Alaska State Museum, Juneau; October 20–January 12, 1992: Oakland Museum, Oakland, Calif.; and February 15–April 30, 1992: Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.—Donald Garfield



A Tour Fit for a King

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CALENDAR

"Rough On" products, which promised to remove rodents as well as corns, are from the Selling the Goods exhibit.

Waterfowling Decoy Gallery

Drawing from one of the most comprehensive collections of Chesapeake Bay decoys, the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum's installation of more than 100 examples attests to their beauty and variety. But through

interpretation, the exhibit also opens visitors' eves to the heritage of decoys and their contribution to the Maryland Eastern Shore area. The exhibit's design includes a decoy carver's workshop and a display showing how decoys are made. Decoys (derived from the Dutch de kooi, meaning cage or trap) enjoyed a florescence after the growth of market gunning from the 1860s until it was banned in 1918.

Permanent installation: Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, St. Michaels, Md.

Selling the Goods: Origins of American Advertising, 1840–1940

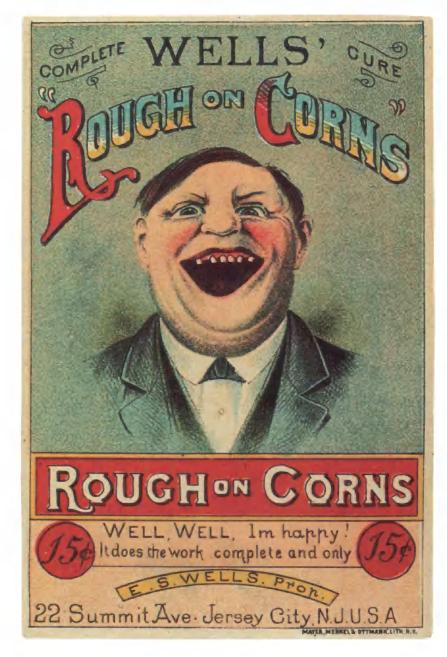
As ubiquitous as the air we breathe, advertising has permeated the consciousness and behavior of the U.S. population, with both positive and negative effects. The century from 1840 to 1940 saw the rise and constant adjustment of advertising techniques to accommodate as well as reflect shifting values and concerns of targeted consumers. The exhibition, which opened in October 1990, looks at the historical roots of ad-

vertising and divides the topic into five sections: early factors creating a favorable climate for advertising; the multiple forms of advertising, its strategies and motivations; the targeting (and exclusion) of markets and the role of ethnic stereotyping; the impact on consumer practices; and advertising in contemporary society. Drawn from the rich holdings of the Strong Museum, Selling the Goods also includes examples of the objects advertised and photos of the products in use.

Long-term installation: Strong Museum, Rochester, N.Y.

Wisdom and Compassion: The Sacred Art of Tibet

The artistic heritage of the Tibetan civilization unfolds in an exhibition unprecedented in the U.S. for the extent of its offerings. Among the 159 objects, works range from a three-inch ivory carving of a Tibetan saint to an 11-foot tapestry of Maitreya Buddha. The exhibit design is patterned after the Buddhist concept of the mandala, passing from the realm of history to that of the spirit.



April 17–August 18, 1991: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco

October 15-December 28, 1991: IBM Gallery of Science and Art, New York

Shared Visions: Native American Painters and Sculptors in the Twentieth Century

Focusing attention on the "fine arts" traditions of Native American art. Shared Visions presents and chronicles the work and experiences of those artists whose native traditions encountered Western culture and responded in unique and varied ways. In addition to a historical overview of 20th-century work, Shared Visions displays contemporary art by artists invited to reflect on the Quincentenary of Columbus's arrival in the Americas.

April–July 1991: Heard Museum, Phoenix

Opening September 1991: Eiteljorg Museum, Indianapolis, Ind. Opening January 1992: Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Okla.

Opening June 1992: Portland Art Museum, Portland, Ore.

Opening October 1992: National Museum of the American Indian's Old U.S. Custom House, New York

Kátky Film: The Art of Czechoslovakian Animation

This extensive survey of animated film in Czechoslovakia from the 1940s to the 1980s shows the range and ingenuity of the art form, encompassing subjects as varied as Hans Christian Andersen and Shakespeare, comments on modern life. and traditional folk tales. Included are 35 animated films, puppets, drawings, and animated cels. Visitors can see the landscapes constructed to stage the puppet films.

March 10–July 2, 1991: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J. August 20–September 30, 1991: University of Arizona Museum of Art, Tucson, Ariz.

November 23–January 19, 1992: Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Neb.

All Systems Go: America's Space Transport for the 1990s

A new era of manned spacecraft opened in 1981 with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's shuttle program, which introduced the concept of reusable vehicles to extraterrestrial travel. All Systems Go traces the program's dramatic history, including the Challenger accident of January 28, 1986, and examines the technology needed to make the shuttle program possible. Organized by the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum, the exhibition is circulated by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service.



Through April 21, 1991: Kansas City Museum, Kansas City, Mo.

May 11–June 23, 1991: William Bonifas Fine Arts Center, Escanaba, Mich.

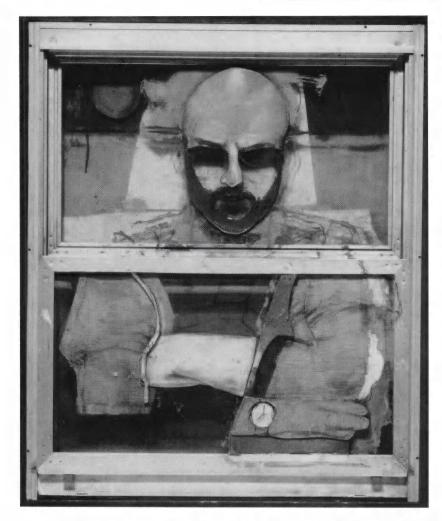
July 13–August 25, 1991: Science Spectrum, Lubbock, Texas

September 14–December 29, 1991: Children's Museum, Bettendorf, Iowa

March 21–May 3, 1992: Midland Center for the Arts, Midland, Mich. The second flight of the space shuttle *Columbia* in November 1981 demonstrated the viability of reusable spacecraft to explore outer space.



A Shawnee, Ernest Spybuck, painted Shawnee Indian War Dance, part of the Shared Visions exhibit.



This 1965 mixed-media work of Larry Rivers, *Jim Dine Storm Window*, draws from the artist's circle of friends.

July 25–September 6, 1992: Dane G. Hansen Memorial Museum, Logan, Kan.

Larry Rivers: Public and Private

The Butler Institute of American Art in Youngstown, Ohio, has joined with the American Federation of Arts to organize and circulate a retrospective of the work of Larry Rivers, a member of the New York School. Covering 40 years of the artist's unpredictable, innovative. and influential career. the show contrasts his public themes and images drawn from his personal life. Rivers's work centers on the human figure and offers precedents for the Pop Art and postmodern appropriation movements.

March 10-May 5, 1991: Norton Gallery of Art, West Palm Beach, Fla.

June 2–July 28, 1991: Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Fort Wayne, Ind.

August 25–October 20, 1991: Scottsdale Center for the Arts, Scottsdale, Ariz.

November 17-January 12, 1992: J.B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Ky.

Florence Henri: Artist-Photographer of the Avant-Garde

Florence Henri is the first major U.S. exhibition of the artist-photographer who championed formalist photography during the period between the two World Wars. In Paris, she digested the lessons of cubism, purism, and constructivism to develop her own innovative style. Works on display include still lifes, abstractions, advertising photographs, portraits, self-portraits, nudes, streetscapes, and photomontage. The exhibition was organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, where it debuted.

March 7-May 1, 1991: Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit

September 1–November 1, 1991: University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City, Iowa

December 19–February 16, 1992: Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Ralph W. Schreiber Hall of Birds

Named for the late curator of ornithology at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, the interactive exhibit uses the latest technologies to inspire visitors to find out about the avian members of the animal kingdom. Three walkthrough habitats and 27 separate learning stations fulfill Schreiber's life goal of leading museum-goers to a higher state of awareness about the richness of bird life and to a conservation ethic necessary for its survival. All the senses come into play, and fun is no stranger to the exhibit, which starts with a greeting from Professor Percy Pelican (vocalized by Jonathan Winters), who lectures visitors on what makes birds birds. Special attention also falls on the California condor, whose survival has engaged the efforts of scientists and conservationists.

Permanent installation: Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County □



of Birds in Los Angeles is the animated professor Percy Pelican, with the voice of Jonathan Winters.

Right: Greeting visitors

to the Schreiber Hall

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American Association for State and Local History

Adding to Collections: Instruments To Make Music (and Spirits) Soar

Swiss House Organ: Shrine to Music Museum

The Shrine to Music Museum in Vermillion, S.D., has purchased a rare 18th-century Swiss house organ. The organ was built by Josef Looßer in 1786, and it is his only six-stop organ known to survive.

Painted in the traditional colorful

style of the Toggenburger region of northeastern Switzerland, the organ joins two other organs at the museum—an American organ dating from 1808 and a 1620 chest organ believed to be made in Germany or Poland.

"This organ rounds out an important aspect of 18th-century organ making," says museum Director André P.

This six-stop organ—now in a South Dakota museum—is the only one of its kind known to survive.



Larson. "Our attempt is to be encyclopedic, but we can't be with organs—they are simply too large. We don't have the space to reassemble cathedral organs, so we are limited to chamber and house organs."

Larson became interested in Swiss house organs in 1979 while traveling in Switzerland, but acquiring one for the museum seemed unlikely: The instruments are considered national treasures, making their export problematic. But one was offered to the museum in early 1990. Lady Berkeley, an Englishwoman, had kept the organ for many years in Assisi, Italy, and because it already was out of Switzerland, the museum purchased it without difficulty.

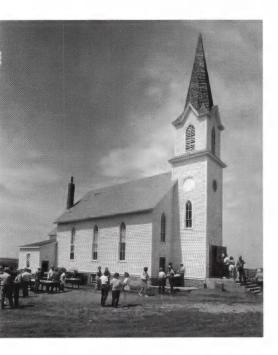
An organ builder from England accompanied the instrument when it was shipped to South Dakota last spring. He spent a week assembling, regulating, and tuning it before the organ could be heard for the first time in the U.S.

Margaret Ann and Hubert Everist of Sioux City, Iowa, provided funding for the acquisition.

Church Artifacts: Vesterheim, Norwegian-American Museum

A disbanded North Dakota Lutheran congregation has donated the artifacts from its Bethania Lutheran Church to Vesterheim, Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah, Iowa.

Vesterheim purchased the church's 20 pews and, for a nominal token price, the church itself at auction. Following the auction, the congregation donated the remaining artifacts, including an elaborate altarpiece carved by Østen Pladson, an August Nlagstad altar painting, an altar rail, a pulpit, a



The Vesterheim museum plans to move this Lutheran church from North Dakota to Iowa.

baptismal font, and a hymn board.

The church's furnishings are notably complete; only the kerosene lamps that originally hung near the pulpit and at the back of the church are missing.

Occupying nearly a square block in downtown Decorah and two satellite sites outside the city, Vesterheim is one of the largest museums in the U.S. dedicated to a single immigrant group. The museum complex includes a general store, a waterpower grain mill, a schoolhouse, a Methodist church, a farmstead, and other buildings. But according to Charles Langton, Vesterheim editor and archivist, the Bethania Lutheran Church will contribute significantly to the museum's collections.

"Norwegian-Americans were predominantly Lutheran," says Langton, "and religious life was central to their daily living. This church is a remarkably complete example of the tradition. The records are complete, and the artwork and woodwork are exceptional. The artisans are known in Norwegian folk art circles."

A group from Decorah, with the help of congregation members and volunteers, dismantled and packed the artifacts. The church building, which was built in 1901, will be moved at a later date.—Nina G. Taylor

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EXHIBITING CULTURES

The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display

EDITED BY IVAN KARP AND STEVEN D. LAVINE

Throwing open to debate the practices of museums, galleries and festivals, Exhibiting

Cultures probes the often politically charged relationships among aesthetics, contexts and implicit assumptions that govern how cultural differences and art objects are displayed.



This innovative volume brings together museum directors and curators, art historians, anthropologists, folklorists and historians to examine how diverse settings have appealed to audiences and represented the intentions and cultures of the makers of objects. The essays address such major issues in the politics of culture as how the learned experience of everyday life is used to make exhibitions comprehensible, what happens to minority and exotic arts when they are assimilated into the hegemonic context of the "great" museums and why ethnographic museums have been neglected in an age of museum expansion.

Based on a landmark conference sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution and the Rockefeller Foundation, the book includes 27 essays by such contributors as Jane Livingston, John Beardsley, Peter C. Marzio and Svetlana Alpers. May 80 b&w illus. 480 pp. Cloth: 1-56098-020-6 \$42.00 Paper: 1-56098-021-4 \$15.95

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Exhibit as Canvas

'Conceptual' History Museum Exhibits Are Works of Art that Aim to Engage Visitors by Blurring the Lines Between Object and Context

By Richard Rabinowitz he word "interpretation" is one of the hottest and most undefined terms in museum talk today. In common parlance, we speak of interpreting in three senses: to translate into another language; to explain, often by putting an idea into context; and to represent the meaning of an idea, as a dancer does, through art.

Museums—especially science, history, and natural history museums—interpret in both the second and third senses. They explain phenomena, largely by reference to historical or ecological contexts or scientific laws. And increasingly, they metaphorically reconstruct their subject through an artful arrangement of elements.

In the history museum world I know best, interpretation has been a growth industry for the past quarter-century. The reasons are many: a stronger recognition of the public and educational responsibilities of museums; the recruitment of more professionally trained historians onto museum staffs; the turn among scholars to the study of the social history of ordinary life and material culture; the success of outdoor history museums as tourist destinations competing with Disney-like theme parks; improvements in film, video, and exhibit-fabrication technologies, which have allowed "hyperrealistic" representations of historical sight and sound; the adoption of interactive, computer-interactive, and hands-on learning approaches by museum educators; and the strong financial encouragement of donors, especially the National Endowment for the Humanities, of concept-based and educationally oriented exhibitions.

The planning of a new regional or local history museum is thus far more today than the orderly arrangement of historical treasures or oddities. A new kind of open-ended question-

Richard Rabinowitz is president of the American History Workshop, an exhibit development firm in Brooklyn, N.Y. ing pervades American history museums. The Oakland Museum asks whether California ever can realize the promise sought by successive generations of dream-seekers. Colonial Williamsburg wants to know how the struggle for national independence relates to the development of a distinctly American consumer culture. The Chicago Historical Society keeps pondering whether organized civic intelligence ever can master the sprawling, dangerous energies of American urban industrial, immigrant, and ethnic life. Old Sturbridge Village sits on the edge of this volcanic historical question: How and why did the tranquil 19th-century New England town foster the elaboration of a new commercial and industrial society-and thus become a historical irrelevancy in the process? And the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, in one new exhibition after another, keeps posing these and other ironies about what Americans call "progress": What did we gain in the creation of a modern, technologically sophisticated, corporate-welfare state, and what did we lose in the abandonment of rural, artisanal, regional, and ethnic cultures?

Such intellectual ambition, coupled with a warmer attitude toward education and innovative media, has enormously complicated the task of exhibition planning and design. Small wonder that museums have turned to talented writers, artists, designers, and media producers, and to new methods of representing the past in producing interpretive exhibits. Directors experiment with team approaches, museums appoint "audience advocates" as planning participants, large sums are expended on preparing flow charts, work plans, prioritized objectives, and budgets.

Amid all this bureaucratization of history museum planning, we sometimes forget that it is an art we are producing. For all the thematic research invested in the creation of an interpretive exhibit, for all the care spent on curatorial documentation and conservation of the artifacts included, the synthesis of the entire exhibit is a single, composite creative act—

Right: At the Chicago
Historical Society, the
exhibit A City Comes of
Age: Chicago in the
1890s addresses
questions about the city's
life, including work in
the local meat industry.



a work of conceptual art. Like the work of artists Sol LeWitt, Joseph Kosuth, Hans Haacke, and others, the new history museum exhibits frequently program the entire space, including the visitor's pathway. They blur the boundaries between the object and its contextualizing or explanatory labels and define the visitors' experience as the product, the artifact, of an interaction with what the artist puts forth.

In fact, Joseph Kosuth recently installed a show in the lobby of the Brooklyn Museum, called The Brooklyn Museum Collection: The Play of the Unmentionable, which used the form of an interpretive exhibit as a frame for representing issues of censorship. Pieces of objectionable art from many different departments of the museum's collection were brought together in a mock-up of a gallery within the museum. Disfigured Italian Renaissance paintings of saints were juxtaposed with Nazi-proscribed products of the Bauhaus, contemporary photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe and others, Armory Show paintings, racist Victoriana objets, and racy Art Nouveau paintings of nude children. Surrounding all

this, as one might find in a typical history exhibit, were bold proscriptions against immoral art by Hitler, Goebbels, and other "protectors" of public decency, as well as a variety of theoretical statements by art historians and critics about art, prurience, political offensiveness, and contemporary cultural standards. Finally, long and well-crafted labels by the museum staff described each of the works on exhibit in the finest style of curatorial discourse.

Kosuth's work differs from a conventional interpretive exhibit in its loose and often inconsistent intellectual structure. No overall historical, aesthetic, or political argument connects the display of the individual pieces. An illuminated Islamic manuscript that is "self-censored" in obscuring the Prophet's face is really not analogous, for example, to a modern photograph of a teenage boy pointing his penis and a pistol at a bound and gagged teenage girl.

Conceptual art exhibits often sacrifice some intellectual complexity to achieve an aesthetic or political goal. History museum shows, on the other hand, usually sacrifice aesthetic values to preserve the density of scholarly infor-

Conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth explored the nature of censorship in this exhibit mounted at the Brooklyn Museum.



mation. Still, the union of strong content and design is vital to the communicative message of the history exhibit. Visual dullness may do more than cripple the teaching; it may turn the exhibit's idea on its head.

Relegating Design to the Designer?

Museum historians and curators frequently miss the vital connection between exhibit design and content. Many museum professionals still believe that interpretive devices, including such conventional elements as labels and casework (as well as stronger invitations to the imagination such as environmental re-creations, film and video, and live interpreters) are secondary to the exhibit content. They are not, after all, artists themselves, and they usually believe that well-researched text and well-chosen artifacts will convey most of their story. But in relegating design considerations to the designer, they may underestimate the intellectually expressive aspects of the design.

As a subspecies of conceptual art, historical gallery exhibits almost always exemplify one rule: The space itself represents the context of the historical subject. There are three types. First, the space may be a fully re-created historical environment, representing more or less literally the surroundings of the historical actors. Especially powerful examples abound in such Canadian museums as the British Columbia Provincial Museum in Victoria or the new Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa. Second, the space may be arranged as a time line, signifying the corresponding linearity of historical time. The permanent exhibit galleries of most state historical societies and most commemorations of historical anniversaries are also framed as chronological expositions. Finally, the space may be a spatial arrangement of concepts—the different peoples who shared a historical event, for example, or the problems addressed in the course of a historical transformation. Portrayals of distinct cultures, such as Native Peoples of the Southwest exhibit at the Heard Museum in Phoenix, or of a distinct era, such as the new Chicago in the 1890s exhibit at the Chicago Historical Society, are so organized.

An excellent example of this last approach is *Native Peoples of the Southwest* gallery at the Heard Museum. Rather than emphasize the desert and mountain terrain through environmental design, the exhibit schematically and systematically surveys, in turn, three geographical and cultural regions of Arizona Indians. Within each of the exhibit's regions, expository graphics, archaeological objects and labels, lovely displays of textiles and ceramics,

reconstructions of architectural elements, and video presentations of contemporary rituals are tightly integrated to provide a dense and comprehensive analytical structure of each native culture type. The use of color-coded labeling, as well as changes in floor surfaces and lighting, also reinforces the boundaries between regions.

No matter how the space represents the historical scene, design is absolutely critical in shaping the relationship of modern-day visitors to the historical or anthropological subjects being interpreted. Velvet ropes and Plexiglas partitions obviously distance us from the original inhabitants of a museum's furnished period rooms, as at the Museum of the City of New York. But when we are allowed to penetrate these spaces—and when they are meticulously reconstructed to include sound effects and exterior perspectives, as in my Canadian examples—visitors almost instantly identify with the historical figures.

Visitors enjoy attributing good order and well-being to rooms that are consistently and coherently furnished, even if the historical message wants to say otherwise. Docents in period dress make the impression of harmony and peace even stronger, even in farmhouses or the rooms of working-class people like the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York. But the adroit use of media can dramatically thaw even the most frozen and static settings.

In a 1983 exhibit on Boston's Jewish community, called On Common Ground, for example, sound-and-light effects were used brilliantly to transform a tumultuous tenement kitchen into a Jewish family's sweet Sabbath dinner. More ambitious still is the Smithsonian's provocative exhibit, A More Perfect Union: Japanese Americans and the United States Constitution, about the internment of West Coast Japanese citizens in out-of-the-way camps during World War II. Across a re-created and furnished room, we can see and hear a video presentation in the opposite doorway, in which an actor describes his childhood memories of life in this space to his daughter. While his personal memory allows visitors to draw nearer to the room and to empathize with its 1940s homeyness, the exhibit seems to say, the actor's historical detachment from the scene allows us to recognize how terrible such internment was.

Almost all designers knowledgeable about the importance of legibility and easy visitor access to exhibit information (and about the costs of exhibit fabrication) will today press curators to establish a clear chronological sequence of historical environments or a rhythDesign is critical in shaping the relationship of visitors to historical or anthropological subjects. Velvet ropes distance us from the original inhabitants of furnished period rooms, but when we are allowed to penetrate these spaces—and when they include sound effects and exterior perspectivesvisitors identify with the historical figures mically regular arrangement of exhibit cases and panels. These design decisions transform the exhibit's historical interpretation.

If a design emphasizes linearity and regularity, its historical message will accent determinism and progression. Events or cultures seem to follow inevitably upon one another. Visitors walk through a history that appears to have no "roads not taken." Further, in many museums that survey the history of a state or province, this means that Native Americans or Canadi-



At the Heard Museum in Phoenix, *Native Peoples of the Southwest* organizes artifacts and information on the basis of three regions of native culture and geography.

ans, as well as the farmers, miners, and fishermen to whom we are first introduced, are thereafter off the stage altogether, as if their only historical significance was to pave the way for modern-day consumer society.

In exhibits of the third type, organized as a spatial arrangement of concepts, the use of a consistent case-and-panel system expresses the curator's coherent organization of the material. But although a time line gives visitors the assurance of knowing where they stand in "the march of history," a conceptual exhibit doesn't derive the same benefit. In the Heard's *Native Peoples of the Southwest* exhibit, for example, relatively few visitors actually use the color-coded interpretive structure to determine where they are in the whole exhibit path.

As their story lines become more complex, history exhibits face a quandary: Can they purchase clarity through good design without oversimplifying their message? An excellent lesson is the Chicago Historical Society's intellectually ambitious exhibit on *A Nation Divided: America in the Age of Lincoln.* Composed of an amazingly rich collection of historical documents and artifacts, and enhanced by elaborate textual commentaries on historical issues, the design does nothing to dramatize the "impending crisis of the Union" or the dangerous course of the Civil War itself. Instead, each exhibit theme (a cluster of ob-

jects, texts, and images, punctuated by enlarged panels derived from period engravings) is designed handsomely in itself. For all that the texts are about conflict, the exhibit design communicates order and progression, just as television news accounts of world crises are sandwiched by commercial breaks.

There is, of course, no one correct way to design a history exhibit. The most important criterion for success is the design's ability to guide and engage real people through what the exhibit authors intend as the conceptual and dramatic trajectory of their story. Exhibits also may house objects and documents. They may include fascinating bits of electronic media. They may have loads of hands-on fun. But a good one knows where it is leading visitors.

Perhaps my favorite example is the Smithsonian's *Field to Factory: Afro-American Migration, 1915–1940* exhibit. Representing the migration of southern African Americans to northern cities in the period between the two world wars, the exhibit leads visitors from a heat-suffused southern landscape through the journey north and into the congested urban squalor of Chicago's South Side. The major original and constructed objects (a sharecropper's cabin, a railroad station, and a northern streetscape) render the major social transformation into a palpable passage; smaller objects and text quietly but effectively illuminate the ordinary horrors of racism and poverty.

The exhibit explores a chapter in our social history that is virtually unknown to European Americans and rarely celebrated by African Americans. Again and again, the exhibit teaches history as only a museum can: by pressing the concrete reality firmly in our minds, animating and altering the abstractions we have learned by reading. It matters, for example, that there were no sleeping compartments on the railroad cars that carried black Americans northward. We cannot escape the discomfort. Indeed, there can be few American visitors who don't shudder at having to pass through either of the two doorways into the railway station marked "Colored" and "White." Such design decisions powerfully enhance the exhibit's educational effectiveness. Field to Factory proves that history exhibits can be an impressive combination of scholarship and conceptual art.

For more than a century, U.S. history museums have been their community's treasure chest, preserving our social, aesthetic, and physical legacy. Now, potentially, the museum also is becoming a community's easel and canvas, an artwork representing who we are and whence we have come.

A Tool for Storytelling

In Some Innovative Exhibits, 'Contextual Layering' Allows the Telling Of a Story Within a Story Without Losing the Organizational Thread

artly based on the emergence of cultural tourism as a generator of visitor centers and museums, and partly based on a growing reaction to "generic" exhibits within children's museums and discovery centers, the power of geographical place is exerting itself as a force in exhibit design. The audiences for these facilities are for the most part local and regional rather than national, and the facilities necessarily depend upon a broad base of visitation and multiple visits for their success. Driven less by collections than traditional museums, these exhibits are increasingly dependent upon the lost art of storytelling.

The outcome of Marilyn Hood's museum visitation research of a decade ago (see *Staying Away: Why People Choose Not to Visit Museums, Museum News*, April 1983) placed traditional museum goers and occasional or nonattendees in seemingly separate camps. The former valued doing something worthwhile—learning—and having a challenge of new experiences; the latter valued being with people, active participation, being at ease in their surroundings, and entertainment. Thus was enjoined the education/entertainment debate. It is a debate that begs the true questions: How can we educate entertainingly? How can we write stories that engage multiple audiences?

As a little boy, my parents used to bring me into New York City to the American Museum of Natural History. Next to tickets to watch the Dodgers play at Ebbets Field, those visits are my fondest childhood memories. With nose pressed against glass, I could gaze for hours at the lions, elephants, and antelope that peopled Carl Akeley's dioramas. Perhaps it was the animals' proximity, or their size, or the extraordinary realism of their settings, that let a young

Christopher Chadbourne is president of Christopher Chadbourne and Associates, a heritage resource development, interpretive planning, and exhibit design firm in Cambridge, Mass. boy imagine himself an adventurer in distant lands. Perhaps, but I think not. What I remember most vividly is the dignity of these animals, their presence. This was their world, not mine, and nothing at the Bronx Zoo could match the wonder and respect I felt at the museum.

Although commercial television for years had been altering the ways in which we gather information (using, for example, the structuring umbrella of "news" to tie together discontinuous fragments of information), they did little to affect how we organized it. The program *Sesame Street* did both, and in so doing transformed American education. Sesame Street, the place, populated by a recurring cast of real and mythic

By Christopher Chadbourne



characters, serves as a referential base against which video can freely operate to explore learning itself. Many of the visuals, however amazing and divergent in image, can be counted on to reappear—the show, for example, always is hosted by a letter and a number. Far from being value free, the show is infused with inclusionary social values. We can use the adventures of the cast to better understand and relate to the real world around us.

Children who grew up watching *Sesame Street* are not less creative or imaginative or smart or less able to relate pieces to wholes. What the show does—what children's museums are doing and what progressive schools

Carl Akeley's display of mammals at New York's American Museum of Natural History uses vivid realism to spark visitor imagination.





are attempting to do—is to explore the very act of learning. Children's museums are not about collecting facts. They are about understanding and the formation of useful constructs at an early age. They are about, as one educator put it, "homefun" rather than homework. Children, museums' future clients, apply whole new ways of learning through technology.

Education itself is moving in the direction of systems within which pieces can be better understood. In reading, "whole language" approaches teach children to learn to read words by figuring out their meanings in context. In math, there is a devaluation of skills for their own sake and an emphasis on using math as an adjunct to logic. In my daughter's third grade class, the topic of water is used as an umbrella for learning that in its various forms leads to discussions of weather, pollution, and cooking and skills in science, math, reading, spelling, and storytelling. The implication in all these emerging methodologies is that context is important, that an organizing storyline against which the pieces can be understood facilitates learning, and that teaching methodologies-like museums-have as twin goals attraction to and retention of the subject matter.

The Resurgence of Storytelling

I remember two things about my history education. First, I didn't have any. I grew up in the age of social studies and civics. Second, I remember my friends being taught about the Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How. Taught as an encyclopaedic compendium of facts, history focused on presidents and popes, generals and conquerors, its books devoid of narrative-structure without images. More recent history, according to Michael Wallace, exists in a collage of remembered television clips coupled with disjointed second-hand memories of friends, family, and acquaintances-images without structure. As Newsweek magazine noted in its 1988 special edition on education, "The natural human fascination with good stories, which the entertainment industry understood so well, was missing from history as taught."

Into that void has stepped docudramas and public television and a changing perception of the valid stuff of history. Alex Haley's *Roots*, the most watched television program in history, lent validity to simple lives lived in the context of a continuing timeline. In academia, Herbert G. Gutman and the American Social History Project reversed the telescope of history to explore the impact of working people on the nation's economy, politics, culture, and society. Suddenly, the people who wouldn't

come to museums are becoming the very stuff of museums. They are joined by a nation increasingly seeking instant rootedness.

At the core of these media histories are stories—first-person remembrances intermingled with images of place, set in context by historians, overseen by storytellers. Potent stuff, this new history, as witnessed by the recent success of *The Civil War* television series. This is a good prescription for education and for locally based exhibits in which historical artifacts still surround the museum.

Whose history are we telling in these regional centers? What do we hope to convey? For what you choose to exhibit, the way you choose to exhibit it, and the story it is meant to convey is but one interpretation, one subset of a collection of histories that could be told. And once recorded, it will become "the" history. Parker Potter has suggested that a valid adjunct display to any history museum might be an exhibit entitled The Paths Not Chosen. Harold Skramstad has suggested the test of "authenticity." I would suggest another is the test of the "uniquely representative." That is, what phenomena or trends are these events representative of, why are they of interest, and how can they be made to convey a unique perspective or device for understanding the subject matter? The movie It's a Wonderful Life, for example, roots hero George Bailey in Bedford Falls, but it also transcends the boundaries of time and place and challenges our mental constructs.

"Unique" implies a context that is the norm—something is unique only if we understand that context. In the Smithsonian's A More Perfect Union: Japanese Americans and the United States Constitution, the Constitution establishes the norm against which an aberrant set of events is set forth and given power. Exhibits establish layers of contextualism against which or through which the story line plays.

Potter asks a tougher contextual question: What do we say about the past, and why, in a particular contemporary social context? Histories are, he argues, "composed from points of view and in the service of various contemporary interests. . . . A clearly articulated 'why' takes the mystery out of answering the 'how' questions by giving them a frame of reference and by giving each element of an exhibit a specific purpose to serve." Some adventuresome exhibits, like A More Perfect Union, are trying to learn from the mistakes of the past and redress social inequities. Will unreflective celebration be replaced with politically correct history? To what extent can exhibits mirror contemporary teaching methodologies? Can they pose open-ended questions, relate historLeft, above: A project being designed for the Woonsocket Visitor Center in Rhode Island will use the immersion setting of a 1929 parochial-school classroom to examine issues of immigrant life.

Left, below: At the American House, Inc., Locomotive Works in Lima, Ohio, a railroad erecting shed is part of a planned exhibit that attempts to layer a rich narrative whole.

ical events to current events, make people take sides in a debate, establish connections between different historical ideas or perspectives? Museum evaluators warn that exposure to different points of view in an exhibit can be confusing. Linear, timeline stories are easier to tell.

Immersion Techniques at Work

The Barkerville Gold Rush exhibit at the British Columbia Provincial Museum redefines the possibilities inherent in Akeley's dioramas. By breaking through the bounding glass wall, surrounding visitors and letting them interact with the exhibit—in this case panning for gold in sand beside a creaking Cornish water-wheel—these settings can act as time machines, establishing context while increasing stimulation and receptivity and minimizing distractions. Multisensory inputs—adding sound, touch, or smell—can add to the immersion. Testing results generally support these hypotheses, and the links to contemporary educational theory are clear.

Immersion is not new. Architectural preservationists employ it. So do living history museums as far back as John D. Rockefeller's Colonial Williamsburg (whose "why" was the avowed objective of inspiring American patriotism). Zoos know about it. Aquariums bring it indoors and supplement it with hands-in tidepools. As we have historically done with the tools at our disposal, exhibit designers have too often followed Marshall McLuhan's dictate and let the medium become the message—collecting and arraying dioramas and immersion settings in sequence as we once did objects, presenting context as spectacle. And yet, deployed strategically in conjunction with other technologies from our ever-expanding kit of tools, the possibility exists of a powerful tool for storytelling in the age of Big Bird.

Several of my company's recent projects explore contextual layering—the deployment of other technologies and the dynamics of movement within immersion settings to deal with multiple points of view, the relationship of past to present, the problems of inexpensively introducing new materials over time, the need for multiple visits, the desire to tell stories within stories without losing the organizational thread.

In La Survivance, Labor in the Blackstone Valley at the planned Woonsocket Visitor Center in Rhode Island—part of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor—we are trying to tell the story of the founding of an immigrant ethnic consciousness, its transformation into a class consciousness, and the subsequent dissolution of the structuring elements of that class consciousness (the International Tex-

tile Union) resulting from capital flight and a post-industrial society. Using five sequential immersion settings-Quebeqois farm, industrial shopfloor, parochial classroom, union hall, and contemporary television news editing room—the attempt is to hold labor's primary story line while permitting literal peeks through partially opened doors to management's perspective. Through oral histories and interactive video, we can structure simulated dialogue between surviving union leaders, management negotiators, and government regulators. In the newsroom, contemporary relevance and an evolving story line are dealt with through newsprint and video dealing with topical local and international issues related to the museum's content—strikes, child labor, a Canadian province's decision to embrace socialism rather than capitalism.

The immigrant setting selected for La Survivance was that of a parochial classroom on the date of the pope's edict excommunicating the local Sentinellists, who resisted bilingual (as opposed to French) education. Visitors move inside the classroom, and primary messages occur via blackboard messages and taped dialogue between simulated priest and student. Audience-triggered questions keyed to particular desks elicit authoritative responses to questions ranging from church support of management to anti-Catholic and ethnic nativism. Like the schoolhouse at the Iron Range Interpretive Center in Hibbing, Minn., desks are personalized with the names of real students of differing eras. Inside, scrapbooks are paired with subjects of period importance. Contemporary children's drawings and essays on a bulletin board reflect immigrant life of various nationalities, engaging present with past. In these ways, secondary exhibits are seen piecemeal, and subsequent visits supplement earlier experiences.

The delicate balance in such contextual layering lays in the clear conveyence of the primary story line, the appropriateness of the contextual setting, and the transmission of secondary information via technologies and techniques that respect their roles as supporting cast while encouraging the multiple visits upon which such facilities depend.

All of this should not scare curators and museum directors. What is developing among the public is a larger, more interested, personally invested, and better educated audience with the ability to assimilate the messages of divergent media—creatively structured. The wonder of Akeley's dioramas hold my daughter as they held me. Style is not substance. Integrity survives the test of time. \square

Right: The Barkerville Gold Rush exhibit at the British Columbia Provincial Museum in Canada sets a high standard of simulated historical context.



Team Players

he exhibition design profession has ar-

Now That Designers Are Full Members of the Exhibition Team, They Can Concentrate on Conceptual Design—But It Wasn't Always So. . .

By Larry Klein

rived. Many universities and colleges offer courses in commercial exhibit and museum design, and a few even offer graduate programs (see article beginning on page 53). Design professionals are accepted members of exhibition teams at many museums. Every AAM meeting features design seminars, talks, workshops, and round table discussionsmost of which are packed to overflowing. AAM's committee on exhibition—the National Association of Museum Exhibition-has become a strong and effective organization since its beginning in the late 1970s, when the first impromptu rump meeting was held at the AAM convention in Kansas City. And the general level of museum design practice has improved a great deal. High-quality books on the topic still are rare, but that is because busy practitioners do not have time to write books—and the financial returns are meager.

This state of affairs did not exist the day I started my job as chairman of the exhibition department at Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History 15 years ago. Despite the anticipation I felt personally—I was excited by the

prospect of attending, that very afternoon, the first planning meeting of the consortium of museums responsible for the Treasures of Tutankbamun exhibition, which was to tour the U.S. in 1977–1979—those were not particularly hopeful days for museums or for museum designers. There was deep and seemingly endless economic turmoil with high inflation and the worst decline since World War II. Only a few of the largest museums had internal, professionally staffed exhibition departments. Accomplished independent design consultants and institutions with notable designers in influential positions were the exception to the rule. Many exhibits were mounted by staff people who had no art or design background whatsoever. The broad level of museum presentation was not impressive.

There also was no association or communications network among museum designers. Designers entered the field from graphic design, trade show design, set design, fine arts, and other vaguely related fields.

Now that all of these conditions have improved dramatically, the challenges confronting design professionals today seem fully large enough to engage their newfound stature. There's plenty to do. The 1980s have seen a virtual explosion of new museums, mammoth rehabilitation projects, branch museums, and museums in retail areas. If vitality can be measured by controversy, then the debates now raging in the museum worldover the perceived shift in values from education to recreation, the control of content by the dominant culture, questions of obscenity, reorganization of the exhibit process, and other issues-indicate that this is indeed a lively time.

Larry Klein is an exhibit and environmental design consultant in Venice, Calif. He was design director of the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles and is the author of Exhibits: Planning and Design.

A new era of exhibitions arrived with the opening of the *Treasures of Tutankhamun* show, which toured the U.S. in the late 1970s.

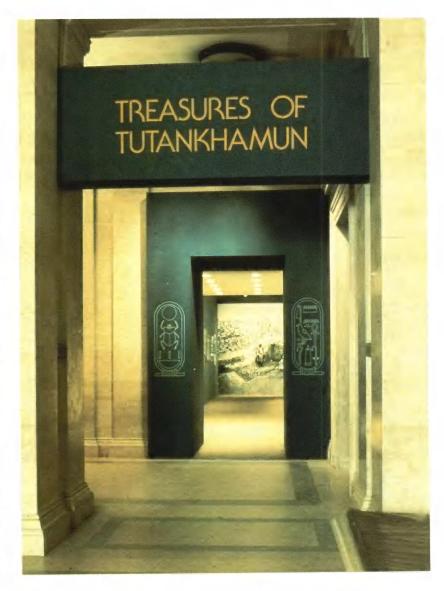
Museum exhibition, too, is going through a period of change, and it isn't technology (or at least not its application in presentation) that's driving it. It is only fairly recently that exhibition has become a subject worthy of intense interest by highly educated and motivated professionals outside of the design professions—and these are the people who are going to have the greatest impact on exhibition and on our museums.

In the past, men like Carl Akeley, Franz Boas, Stephan Borhegyi, and others have changed the nature of museum exhibition, but they were, for the most part, inspired anomalies with their own revealed, intuitive visions. I expect and hope there will be more of them. But what is beginning now is the emergence of a cadre of exhibit professionals who will change the way we see and experience exhibits. And that will change the way we designers plan and execute them. We're just beginning to understand how and why people are engaged by, interact with, and learn from exhibits. This immensely complex task is simply beyond the scope of designers except as members of the team.

So where does this leave designers? In a very good place. It leaves them to work cooperatively with all of the others who are essential to the process. It leaves them to concentrate on conceptual design—the enormously engrossing and demanding task of developing the very means of content delivery. It challenges them to tell the story, to physically fashion the cafeteria of ideas that the modern museum must be. It means designers must be willing to question and, if necessary, abandon loyalties to formal or minimalist aesthetic doctrines that are not based on performance and results.

A large terra incognita of design and perception still exists, but it is not as large as one might suppose. Design schools tend to focus on "style" and many never so much as touch upon the knowledge available regarding such elemental and well-researched topics as legibility. I for one am more than happy to let curators be curators, educators be educators, and psychologists be psychologists—and to be able to devote my energies to what I know best how to do.

It's been more than 12 years since the Tut show closed in San Francisco after its astonishingly successful tour, and the museum community since has seen a parade of major touring exhibitions. Now, at least one entertainment producer, who has no experience working with museums, is planning a number of traveling exhibits, some of which will occupy as much as



20,000 square feet. These will be completely independently managed, produced, installed, and operated. They will have multinational business sponsors, large advertising and promotion budgets, and multimillion dollar business plans intended to generate strong public awareness and attendance—and large bottomline profits. The shows will have national and local retail tie-ins and promotions. There will be nominal association or cosponsorship arrangements with local museums, some of whom will receive a share of the profits. But in many, if not all, locations, the exhibits will be installed in convention centers and the like because of their size.

If this revolutionary way of privately organizing for-profit blockbuster exhibits is successful, how long will museums be needed as partners? What will this mean to the museum community and museum designers? I don't know. But with the change I've seen since 1975, it's going to be even more interesting in the years to come.

When visitors entered the portals of the King Tut extravaganza, they saw a dazzling display; this, in turn, helped fuel the public's taste for "blockbuster" exhibitions.

Monologue to Dialogue

In the Evolution of Presentation, Museums Are Entering a Phase in Which Exhibits Present Multitple Perspectives and Encourage Visitors to Shape Their Own Experiences



The entry to *Perpetual*Motif: The Art of Man

Ray gave form to a core
concept, the artist's play
with illusion and reality.

By James W. Volkert

xhibition design emerged late on the stage of museum history, which I propose consists of two distinct eras and a third one we are perhaps now entering.

The first period continued in fits and starts for the better of 2,000 years and established the museum's great authority. On an excursion

James W. Volkert is project manager of exhibitions at the National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C. through this era, one could return to the study centers of Ptolemy, wander through the collections of religious art and natural oddities of the Middle Ages, and stop during the 1800s for a brief visit to the British Museum. In *Introduction to Museum Work*, G. Ellis Burcaw describes the public policy of the venerable museum: "The British Museum was said to be open to the public, but received 30 visitors daily. These had to apply for admission well in advance [and] present their credentials at the office. If acceptable, they had to wait two weeks for an admission ticket." A working as-

sumption reinforcing museum authority—and characterizing the first era—is that the object speaks in an arcane language only to the few privileged enough to understand it.

Little of this attitude changed in subsequent years, though there were several museum milestones during this period, including the founding of Peale's Repository for Natural Curiosities in 1802, the Smithsonian Institution in 1846, and the emergence around 1870 of the American Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. At this point, there was no need for an exhibition designer.

Then in 1909, a shift occurred at the Newark Museum under the leadership of John Cotton Dana. A step toward the second era began when he said, "A good museum attracts, entertains, arouses curiosity, leads to questioning and thus promotes learning." He continued, "The museum can help people only if they use it; they will use it only if they know about it and only if attention is given to the interpretation of its possessions in terms they, the people, will understand."

Amid the broad sweep of events since Dana wrote, two phenomena have emerged since roughly 1965 that herald the second era—which validates communication to the visitor through conscious efforts and unconscious association. The first and most visible was the blockbuster exhibition. The term comes from World War II and refers to a huge, high-explosive bomb capable of leveling entire city blocks. (In the case of some exhibitions, it is a not wholly inappropriate term.)

For me, the first sense of its impact came with King Tut's arrival in Los Angeles during his 1977–79 American tour. The exhibition had it all: a glimpse of an ancient civilization, a royal family, gold, and a curse. People ringed the block waiting for their turn to wonder and gaze. They had to participate in this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, perhaps without realizing why. The show was the occasion for extensive coverage of a museum exhibition in the popular press (unusual until then) and a favorite topic on the party circuit.

The Tut show also stretched my sense of exhibition design by the way it affected the visitor on many levels: intellectually, emotionally, and physiologically. Clearly, the installations had less to do with the objects and called for the interaction of the visitor with the object. Although not the first show to do this, King Tut's visit had a lasting and broad impact.

This leads to the other milestone marking the second era. In the late 1960s, the shift implied by Dana finally occurred. The idea of direct public interaction with exhibits and collections took root. This was primarily because of two institutions that have changed the basic nature of museums and helped to usher in the second era.

While the Boston Children's Museum was established in 1913, it was under Michael Spock that the idea of the participatory exhibit blossomed. He made learning a critical element of a museum's goals. As Elaine Heumann Gurian, formerly in Boston and now at the National Museum of the American Indian, says, "The subject was not of primary interest, but the enfranchising of the viewer was."

This sensibility got a further boost at San Francisco's Exploratorium under Frank Oppenheimer. Discussions began to focus on how people learn and relate to their environment, what form teaching strategies for exhibitions should take, and how to acknowledge the varied intelligences of our visitors. In short, museum education as a field came of age. We began looking for new ways to communicate without having to write it all on the wall. We had to find new vocabularies for exhibitions that had little to do with numbered checklists.

Embracing the Subjective

Last year, the Field Museum in Chicago opened Traveling the Pacific. The exhibition did not display the 36,000 Melanesian artifacts in the museum's massive collection, but rather produced a discussion in metaphor. What was it like to navigate thousands of miles in an open canoe? What are the sights, sounds, and smells of a Polynesian marketplace? Traveling the Pacific embraces the subjective and consists of open-ended questions woven into a design structure that prompts discussion. It is adjective, not noun laden. It relies on the visual vocabulary of the exhibit designer in a new way, who has to make it up along the way so that solutions are refreshingly new each time. We make it up in a way that calls for a synthesis of collected experience—ours and our audience's. If the statement is that the Pacific is vast, what kind of physical form does that take? A map that relies on a cartographer's sense of scale or something much bigger?

Although this approach carries a wonderful openness in its search for dialogue with the audience, the language is loaded. What we have to say, in great part, reflects who we are. Our biases are buried, often subtly, in what we choose to say.

Lisa Roberts, in an article for the winter 1989 issue of *Museum Education* wrote, "Museums have the authority to select, interpret, and present that which they decide has value

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An exhibtion's 'core statement' calls for the show to be shaped by visitor experience, not the show's content. It acknowledges the developers' bias and offers a touchstone for the progression, organization, and layout. It gives a means of assessing the relevance of any given design solution in something other than our own jargon

or significance. Removed from their original contexts and functions, objects take on new meanings that are sometimes laden with unconscious interests. Some museum professionals lose sight of the fact that exhibition is by its very nature an interpretive act. The process of selecting and arranging objects is at bottom a fabrication and, as such, a statement about what the fabricators suppose an object to say."

If museums begin to acknowledge openly the inherent biases of their efforts, it will likely lead to two developments. First, museums will begin to present multiple points of view, understanding that we are conditioned by who we are and by our collective experience. Second, museums as imagined and fabricated places will no longer be a neutral authority, the dispassionate institution, the label of truth on the wall.

Further, exhibitions will change from monologue to dialogue. This exchange will require exhibition creators to take a step forward and identify themselves to the public. This quite literally could mean the signing of exhibitions by the developers and the demystification of the process with a product that carries the tone of conversation. This emerging openness will produce fundamental philosophic changes in museum presentations.

Communicating Through Titles

Museum fashion now dictates that exhibition titles must be "colonized:" Mermaids, Mummies, and Mastadons: The Evolution of the American Museum or Field to Factory: Afro-American Migration, 1915–1940. Rarely does one find a title as straightforward as 64 Pretty Good Paintings by Mark Rothko or A Show that Explains Fluid Dynamics Using Small Words. The convention today is for exhibition titles to provide the wonderful metaphor and image; then, in an effort to make sure the audience understands what's in the show, to supply a hard-information tag line. It is right-brain and left-brain thinking meeting over a punctuation mark.

At a deeper level, exhibition titles often demonstrate an attempt to communicate to the visitor the very essence of the show, the core concepts that have driven the effort and function as the fulcrums around which the entire project pivots. They are the statements that always are true, regardless of what a project looks like, and they define with precision the organizing principles of the exhibition. They are statements articulated in a way that carries both the spirit and assumptions of a show. Core concept statements tend to an-

swer these kinds of questions. Who is the exhibition for? What is being taught? How can an exhibition be defined without merely describing its contents? Core statements have little to do with checklists but reflect the specific messages museums want to communicate to their visitors.

Developing core statements often calls for the continued distillation of ideas until the driving purpose of an exhibition is uncovered. For example, the exhibition design program for a new river estuary wildlife preserve was struggling to outline exhibitions that would capture visitors' imaginations and engage them in a discussion of human interaction with the habitat. The initial search for meaning was in the content of the subject area. This process produced volumes of jargon for those already interested in the delicate ecological relationships of the site, but it could not produce a core statement. Core statements are not about things but about relationships. They are the few words that demonstrate a clear understanding of the reasons for and the relevance of the very public act of exhibition.

After much discussion, the core statements for the estuary project were consolidated into two sentences: "All of the information we know about this site is the result of careful observation by a wide range of people, most of whom we call scientists." And "The exhibitions are intended to empower the visitor for first-hand observation, investigation, and understanding, with the goal of forming an emotional and subjective bond with the habitat."

This kind of statement calls for an exhibition that is shaped by the visitor's experience, not the show's content. It acknowledges the bias of the developers and offers a touchstone for the progression, organization, and layout of the exhibition. It gives a means of assessing the relevance of any given design solution in something other than our own jargon.

The validity of this theory will determine the future of exhibition design. If it holds, the very nature of museums will change. Museums will incorporate multiple voices that demonstrate our diversity and present information on levels and in ways that correspond to our various methods of learning. Ideas will become clear nonverbally.

Although the future certainly will offer exhibition producers a rich and diverse collection of tools for communicating with the audience, we may also be looking at shows that are shaped to a greater degree by the visitor's experience and that give more thoughtful answers to such questions as these: Why are we doing this? And who cares? \square

'Gallery of Discovery'

The Museum that Added Dioramas to the Exhibit Vocabulary Now Offers Visitors a New Temporary Escape Into Another World

useums of natural history: Their very names conjure vivid images and memories for generations of museum visitors. For most, these are images of stimulating exhibit environments that inspire interest in the natural world and the cultures that make humankind unique. For others, there are childhood memories of tiresome school trips to dimly lit galleries of dusty glass cases overcrowded with artifacts.

There was a time when the latter image was prevalent—a "cabinet of curiosities" era in

James Kelly is senior exhibits designer at the Milwaukee Public Museum in Wisconsin. which museum exhibits were simply the public storage of an entire collection of artifacts representing the personal mission of an individual curator or donor. Eventually a new concept entered the picture, the concept that these institutions and their exhibits had a responsibility to the visiting public. Gradually, other notions and pressures began to shape the way museum exhibits were designed and for whom they were created.

One of the early pioneers in the public concept of exhibiting was the Milwaukee Public Museum, where a young taxidermist named Carl Akeley elected not to display his lifelike mounted animals in systematic rows of lifeless glass cases. Instead, in 1890, he created the world's first total-habitat diorama.

This first diorama depicted a family of

By James Kelly

As part of the Milwaukee Public Museum's History of the Habitat display, a dinosaur swamp exemplifies the kind of diorama typical of natural history museums.



muskrats in their natural environment. It featured mounted animals in a realistic, three-dimensional foreground enhanced by a surrounding background mural that convincingly expanded the setting. Unlike other faunal exhibits of the time (stuffed specimens in cases that portrayed the physical appearance of the animal but had no other story to tell), the diorama visually illustrated where a specific group of animals lived and how they interacted with each other and with their environment. The habitat diorama proved to be a significant development in the educational quality of exhibits for museum visitors, providing an appealing context for better understanding the natural world.

Dramatic Open Habitats

Since Akeley's time, traditional habitat dioramas—which quickly became the display standard for natural history museums—went on to incorporate the human species in an equally effective manner and evolved into many experimental variations. Examples are the large, open dioramas, which are not protected by a glass barrier and allow visitors to walk around and view the scene from many different vantage points.

The absence of a glass barrier creates the sensation of being inside or a part of the exhibit, and the popularity of that experience began to diminish the use of conventional glassenclosed dioramas. Eventually, these dramatic open habitats would encompass the visitor, employing sound and lighting effects to intensify the sensory impact, creating atmospheres that stirred the imagination and encouraged learning.

The same was true for architectural habitat displays. Like the diorama, these ethnic villages and marketplaces portrayed where and how a particular group of people lived and often illustrated, via the building structures and the materials used to construct them, unique adaptations for survival in other climates and environments. They also offered another great advantage—the ability to exhibit large quantities of cultural artifacts in a natural and understandable context.

Despite the many other advances in exhibit concepts and technologies that have occurred over the years, architectural habitats and variations of the diorama still remain the most appealing exhibit types at natural history museums, probably because they offer visitors that compelling opportunity to escape temporarily to another place or time. Museum-goers can tour a marketplace in India, ride with Crow Warriors on a Great Plains bison hunt, or travel

backward in time to the floodplain home of ancient dinosaurs. Although television and the film industry offer similar opportunities, the museum experience is a "you are there" encounter, one that is centered on authentic artifacts or scientifically accurate reproductions. And it's an experience that can be digested at each visitor's individual pace and interest level. This freedom to dream, to reflect, and to participate at will with exhibit content is perhaps one of the most important reasons that natural history museums have remained popular despite intense competition from theme parks and other visitor attractions.

So when the Milwaukee Public Museum set out to create a major new biology exhibit in the late 1980s, the visitor appeal of the habitat display had to be considered. After many months of research and planning, a rain forest format finally emerged. What better environment could there be to present the concepts of modern biology? The American tropical rain forest has the richest variety of terrestrial life on earth, and examples of living organisms could be found there to illustrate any of the biological processes and principles planned for the display. And what could be more appealing to our midwestern audience than the allure of a tropical rain forest-especially during the long winter season?

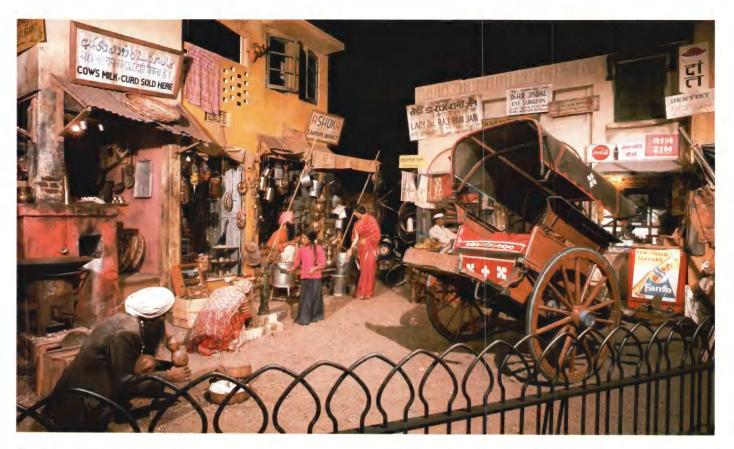
But visitor popularity is not the only pressure molding exhibit design and content in museums today. Present-day costs for creating museum exhibits are considerable. To attract government grants and foundation support, new exhibits need to be timely and educationally innovative, and they need to communicate to all ages and strata of society. It was clear that these demands would require more than a thematic habitat. We also would need audiovisual theaters, interactive displays, and numerous other technologies designed to encourage visitor participation.

A new approach to the habitat exhibit was developed, one that could incorporate a variety of display techniques while still retaining the appealing sense of being immersed in a lush, tropical environment. After considerable evaluation, an "explore at will" gallery was designed, a multimedia information center that would allow visitors to interact freely with exhibits of personal interest instead of following a compulsory pathway of interdependent displays.

To create the overall rain forest habitat, the museum organized a collecting expedition to Costa Rica, and following its successful completion, the exhibit gallery was systematically transformed into a tropical environment. The



Replicas of macaws populate the museum's exhibition *Rain Forest: Exploring Life on Earth.*



This Old Delhi market from the *History of the Habitat* exhibition is an example of an open architectural diorama.

concrete ceiling was stenciled with overlapping patterns of rain forest leaves, and thousands of botanically accurate facsimiles were installed directly below to create the illusion of a dense understory. Reproductions of vine-covered tree trunks appear to penetrate this canopy of leaves and soar upward.

A floor-to-ceiling waterfall was erected in the center of the gallery to display groupings of tropical plants and animals and also provide an ever-present sound of falling water. The other side of this enormous rock structure features an educational amphitheater where visitors can watch a variety of video presentations on tropical biology.

To populate our forest habitat, taxidermists and biological model-makers prepared hundreds of tropical animals. Although authentic specimens were desired for the interpretive biological exhibits, the museum made an ethical commitment to use scientifically accurate reproductions of animals in the overall rain forest environment. Dozens of macaws, toucans, and parrots were convincingly fabricated along with numerous reproductions of bats, frogs, lizards, and snakes.

In total, the gallery environment and all of the interpretive exhibits were designed to appeal to visitors' senses as well as their curiosity. As they explore this tropical environment, they are surrounded by the sounds of rain forest life. Hidden speakers broadcast the cries of tropical birds, the territorial barking of howler monkeys, and the hypnotic chorus of tree frogs and cicadas. Every 20 minutes, these faunal noises quiet as distant thunder turns to the sound of raindrops falling on canopy leaves and a tropical thunderstorm sweeps across the gallery.

At the edge of the forest, a research field station introduces visitors to the "Workings of Science" displays. Inside, a biologist is collecting specimens and scientific data that will aid in understanding rain forest interrelationships. In the canopy of leaves above the field station, another biologist gathers data from a research platform, studying organisms and their environments above the forest floor. These exhibits were designed to show the adventure of field research in contrast to the neighboring urban installations—a curator's office at the Milwaukee Public Museum and a fully equipped biotechnology laboratory.

Despite the many pressures and unforeseen circumstances that could have affected its outcome, the exhibit turned out to be what we had hoped for all along—a gallery of discovery and adventure that presents the processes and principles of modern biology in a stimulating and entertaining fashion. And in the process, it also sensitizes museum visitors to the amazing beauty and diversity of the tropical rain forest, along with the present-day threats to its continued existence. \square

Professional Preparation

To Supplement the Current System of Learning On the Job, Graduate-Level Training Programs for Museum Exhibit Designers and Planners Are Making Their Debut



A s museums become increasingly responsive to their audiences—by shifting from simple object display to new mandates to communicate—exhibition takes on a key significance in the institution's presence and even survival. But two questions then arise: What is to be communicated, and how should it be presented in physical form?

Exhibit planners and designers, whose abilities and intellectual range can help spell success in these public efforts, are vital players in this process. But the precise qualities exhibition designers need to be effective are only just beginning to be identified.

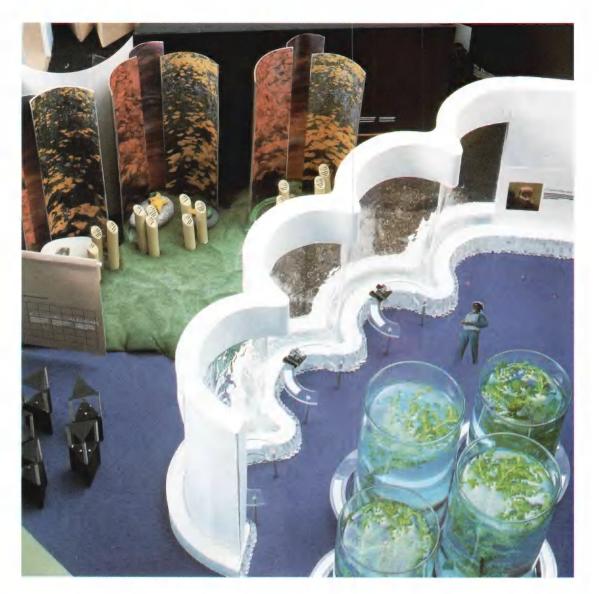
Exhibition design is one of the last disciplines within the museum profession for which no specific professional training is required or even available. Novice museum exhibition designers typically enter the museum community by chance or uninformed intent, with backgrounds ranging from graphic design, architecture, industrial design, theater, and education to a number of less obviously related disciplines. Frequently, their true professional training comes about by learning on the job.

This apprenticeship system results in design

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By Jane Bedno

Museum News: March/April 1991



Part of a joint integrated exhibit design on natural science and artificial intelligence included this student project on evolution.

personnel who learn and absorb the philosophy and limitations of their own institution as they acquire exhibition skills. Institutional budgetary factors and time constraints often limit exposure to other methods of exhibition development. The staff designer seldom visits other institutions with similar collections and missions; designers outside a large city seldom have the chance to see any number of significant exhibitions outside their own institution; and big-city designers might not have the time (or the encouragement of their institution) to visit other museums within their community. Moreover, design staff are seldom familiar with the significant books and periodicals that address current museum issues. As a result, they have little exposure to the philosophical discourse and research arising outside their own institutions.

This professional shortsightedness has a number of visible and less-visible results, many of which are on view in U.S. museums. Designers who lack both professional training and informed exposure to other exhibition philosophies and techniques will continue to perpetuate the exhibition "rules" of the institution within which they were trained. Out of this confluence of factors comes exhibitions in which graphics and surfaces, structure, or theatrical effects dominate—perhaps to the detriment of effective exhibition communication.

Many museums function as extensions of academia, and museum staff people with advanced university degrees often find it difficult to regard "academically underqualified" members of the design department as functional equals. The subject specialists on the exhibition development team, indeed, might consider the designer no more than a set of hands—the craftsperson who will implement the dictates of the curator's scholarly research. Similarly, the designer who works as part of an exhibition development team might not fully understand or respect the significance of protecting the integrity of information and collections, communicating with a diverse public, or

addressing other nondesign requirements of the institution. The designer also might have a difficult time working in a team context and understanding the role of the other specialists involved. A lack of exposure to team practice during the designer's education—coupled with the romanticization of individuality over communal effort within schools of art and design—only compounds the situation.

In the past, the possessor of a thorough grounding in fine or applied arts was frequently also a gifted generalist: Training for the arts did not then require the sacrifice of a liberal education. The intense pressure of current practice, however, has forced design schools to concentrate intensively on skills, and many graduates therefore possess little academic background, verbal skills, or understanding of disciplines other than their own.

Experience demonstrates that exhibition design needs the generalists, designers with an ability to plan broadly, digest information easily, apply the full range of museum experience and contemporary technology, handle the mechanics of multifaceted projects, understand and respond to audiences, communicate effectively, and grow professionally. Where will this new breed of exhibition designer come from—designers equipped to deal as equals with other museum professionals and together create the new, responsive public museum?

Focused Professional Training

As in other museum disciplines, the ideal range of talents is most likely to be achieved by professionals who have the grounding of a specifically focused professional education, as opposed to on-the-job training. The time has come for the establishment of formal graduate university programs in museum exhibition design. Such programs would provide an understanding of process, a broad exposure to current museum practice, professional ethics, technical skills, a knowledge of technology, and a balance between exposure to actual museum practice in an extended internship and continued study of alternate systems and approaches. Graduates of design, architecture, or theater programs would learn to apply undergraduate skills within the full range of museum practice, broadening their intellectual horizons to encompass areas left out of their undergraduate training. Academically oriented students would gain a clearer understanding of museums while developing essential design skills. Typically, when such students are enrolled in a focused graduate program, they develop the necessary design skills relatively rapidly.

Designers who receive their professional ed-

ucation in such a graduate program would enter a museum design staff with their blinders off, able to understand the needs of the total institution—able, in fact, to function as a more creative part of the whole. Graduate training also offers an opportunity generally lacking in actual museum practice: the chance to experiment, to develop new ideas and approaches, and to become mature designers before a specific institution puts its stamp of identity on them. Potentially, the graduate exhibition design program would have much to offer the profession. To quote Katherine McCoy of Cranbrook Academy, "A mature profession has a reciprocal cycle that connects practice to education to research and back to practice, with each component of the cycle interacting with and enriching the others."

The National Association for Museum Exhibition, AAM's standing professional committee on exhibition, has spearheaded the effort to define the role of the exhibition designer and enumerate the areas that must be addressed in their education. The N.A.M.E. education committee deliberated and subsequently developed a series of guidelines identifying the necessary elements for an exhibition design curriculum.

The University of the Arts in Philadelphia started the first formal program implementing the N.A.M.E. guidelines in September 1990. The two-year program culminates in an M.F.A. degree in museum exhibition planning and design. Students learn to deal with space, materials, technology, media, graphics, light, economics, and project management. Following the basic tenets of design education now followed by most U.S. design schools, students learn by actual practice, both as individuals and as members of teams engaged in hypothetical and actual projects. They learn how museums function by engaging in guided exploration of the museums of the region, participating in professional seminars, and visiting and talking with museum professionals ranging from directors to special consultants. Supervised museum internships provide exposure to a working environment. Students also produce theses that concentrate on those areas of practice in which they hope to focus their future professional careers.

Many gifted individuals in the museum design profession have acquired all of these skills and more by their own diligence and effort in a system that hindered them as often as it promoted their growth. In a new era of museums that are answerable to the public, will we have a new generation of professionally prepared designers ready to meet the challenge? \square

The time has come for formal graduate university programs in museum exhibition design. Such programs would provide technical skills, exposure to current museum practice, an understanding of process, a knowledge of technology, and a balance between exposure to museum practice and study of alternate systems and approaches

Facts On File

To Alleviate 'Computer Anxiety,' Curators Should Assist in Planning And Implementing Every Museum Collections Automation Project

By Suzannah Fabing

A s more museums embark on the task of computerizing their collection records, the anxiety level among curators often rises. If the curator's role in automating collections data is properly understood, however, much of that anxiety can be alleviated.

The curator's help and advice are important in the three phases of an automation project: planning and design, conversion from manual to computer records, and testing and implementation.

Planning the System

The planning and design phase begins with a "needs analysis." Someone—usually a project coordinator from the museum's staff or an outside technical consultant—will gather information from each department on the kinds of collections records it keeps, what uses it puts them to, and what each department wishes it were able to do but can't. A questionnaire may be used, often followed by a series of interviews. Although it can be tedious to spell out what you already know so well yourself, it is

crucial that those who will be shaping the broad outlines of the automation system understand as much as possible about how you work or would like to work.

The goal of a needs analysis is to develop a list of the types of information to go into the data base and a scheme for arranging the information. The smallest elements of data are called fields. An example might be the title of a painting or an artist's birth date. All the fields pertaining to a given object or individual constitute its record. A file comprises all the records of a certain type—for example, artists or donors. A good needs analysis should consider not only what data ought to be collected but also how it will be retrieved and what "output"—reports, cards, lists, and the like—is desired. You might never wish to print out a list of which curatorial department is responsible for each object, but if each curator will want to formulate queries or make lists that pertain only to the objects in his or her domain, it is necessary to include a field for curatorial department for sorting purposes.

Some information might need to be recorded in two different ways, so that it can appear in different forms for different purposes. For example, you might want to include a concise description of the medium that follows art-historical convention for use on labels and in captions ("pen and wash," "oil on canvas"), but for purposes of conservation or research on materials, you might wish to record the same drawing as being executed in "irongall ink and sepia wash on off-white wove paper" or the painting's support as "heavy twillweave linen-type fabric." The form of a donor's name in the credit line might by policy be left to the whim of the donor, but you probably will want to identify him or her by a consistent form of name in a separate field, so that

Computer cataloguing is more than data entry: It requires both initial preparation of the data and review by curators upon completion.



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	Art
Accession no. <u>1949.53.1</u>	Category Print
Collection German Expressionist	
Title:	Artist information:
Mother and Child	Ms. Kathe Kollwitz (title) (first name) (last name)
Credit line (from	Lived 1867 to 1945
Gift of M.C. Sloss	Nationality/Culture: German
Subject Motherhood	Biography (from):
Produced at Dresden Germany	Born in Prussia. Studied Art in Berlin
Year produced:	and Munich. Influenced by work of
Signature Yes at Lower left Medium Etching	Remarks (from):
Dimensions: 5"H x 7 3/4"W	
Make report First «	Go to Set search

you can readily create a list of everything the donor has given your museum.

The result of the needs analysis likely will be a long wish list. The next step in planning is to decide how much of this extensive list to undertake first. I've found that the most prevalent cause of failure of museum computer projects is that they were overly ambitious at the start. (A second, related cause is that they were underfunded.) A data base is of very little use until it contains the same types of information about all or a large proportion of the institution's holdings, yet for many daily museum activities, the amount of information required about each object is not immense. For this reason, automation works best on the principle of a layer cake: A certain useful but limited amount of information should first be collected about the entire collection, or at least about significant subgroups; once that is in place, other "layers" can be built one at a time, containing additional information about each object.

The curator should play an important role in determining what data should be collected in the initial phase, working with the registrar, the editor of publications, and others who frequently need information about the museum's holdings. Consider these two questions:

1. What information is necessary to do some of the most common tasks? Because automating

collection records will involve a lot of work by a number of staff members, it is important that there be tangible rewards early on. Be modest in what you undertake, but not too modest. It might be that artist, title, accession number, and location are all that is needed to take a physical inventory or generate lists for solander boxes; but by adding a few more fieldsthe credit line, date, and medium, for example—it might be possible also to produce photo labels, slide labels, and the annual report lists. Don't forget those sorting fields that help you separate the records into useful blocks: curatorial department, whether the work can be lent, the nationality of the artist, or the basic type of object (print, drawing, painting, or sculpture) are examples, but there might be others specific to your museum's operating patterns.

2. Is there a reliable source of accurate information at hand? To some extent, the computer can be used to help point up inconsistencies and make it easier to standardize terminology, but it won't show that the dimensions you have entered are wrong or that the medium was a guess hazarded by a summer intern rather than the judgment of a knowledgeable curator or conservator. If the data haven't been collected at all, it will slow down the project enormously to assemble it along the way. No

This example of an art museum data base—showing the fields within one record—comes from a data base system by OakTree Software Specialists designed for Apple Macintosh computers.

Museum News: March/April 1991

matter how desirable it would be to have the size of every sculpture's stand in the data base, omit it from the initial phase if that information has not been kept. Create a field in which it can be entered later, after next summer's intern is sent out with a measuring tape.

Converting the Records

Once the scope of information to be gathered in the first phase has been agreed upon, take a closer look at the nature of each type of information. One fact, such as the artist's name, may be broken into several fields—title, first name or names, last name, and suffix, for example—so that a name like Pieter Brueghel the Elder can be correctly alphabetized and inverted. Certain types of information, such as artist, might have multiple occurrences within

Be suspicious if you are told that the computer forces you to do something that distorts your data; almost any roadblock can be circumvented. On the other hand, automation presents a golden opportunity to do housekeeping tasks and develop standard procedures where they should exist

a single object's record, and you will need a mechanism for clarifying what the multiple occurrences mean—whether the work is by Rembrandt *and* Lievens, or Rembrandt *or* Lievens, for example. For other kinds of information, you might prefer to store multiple occurrences not as simultaneous possibilities but as changes over time—a history of the insurance valuations assigned each time the work goes out on loan, for example, together with the date and the name of the person establishing the valuation.

Although it is the computer expert's job to help frame the questions that must be addressed, the curator can be particularly useful in this kind of detailed analysis of the nature of the data, because the curator is most likely to be aware of the most challenging eccentricities that the system will have to accommodate: the book with illustrations by 50 different artists, or the tapestry for which it is necessary to record the cartoonist, the weaver, and the manufacturer. It is important to bring these problems to light at this stage. Even if the decision is to adopt a simple solution for the initial phase. the overall design of the system should be done in full knowledge of the toughest problems it someday will need to address.

At the end of this stage of planning, the coordinator will produce a data dictionary, which lists each field, defines it, and describes its characteristics (how long it is, whether it repeats, whether it accepts numbers or alphabetic characters, and so forth).

Because computers are literal-minded, they cannot easily know that synonyms are related. Works listed as serigraphs and silk-screens, for example, will turn up on two different lists, and neither will be found in a search for "prints" unless the machine is instructed to relate these terms. For this reason, standardizing the terminology used in certain fields will produce the best results in searches. Developing the list of terms to be used, known as the controlled vocabulary, can be a major undertaking. A committee of curators ought to establish agreement where possible and to document the differences where not.

Be suspicious at this juncture if you are told that the computer forces you to do something that distorts your data. Almost any roadblock can be circumvented, although at a cost. On the other hand, automation presents a golden opportunity to do much-needed housekeeping and develop standard procedures across the institution where they should exist. If the drawing department uses "Anthonie van Dyck" but the painting department spells it "Anthony Van Dyck," the computer can be programmed to find all records using either spelling. But now may be the time to adopt a single, preferred spelling institution-wide.

A number of ambitious efforts have been under way in recent years to create standardized vocabularies, or authorities, for dealing with museum data. If the curators at your museum can agree to adopt some of these, it will save a tremendous amount of time and effort. Bibliographic abstracting services, for example, have produced authority lists for the names of artists. The Art and Architecture Thesaurus has developed hierarchical vocabularies of terms used in art and architectural history, complete with definitions. Chenhall's Nomenclature establishes a classification scheme for man-made artifacts. Iconclass offers a system (albeit a complex one) for describing subject matter. Museums with holdings similar to yours might be willing to share specialized vocabularies they have compiled. The curator is best equipped to determine whether these existing models will work.

Once the curators and other relevant staff members have defined the fields and the vocabulary, the coordinator can produce a basic set of instructions for the cataloguers, who will actually enter the data. This should be seen as a first draft of what will become a cataloguing manual. Nobody, no matter how experienced with computerization or familiar with the museum's holdings, can anticipate every eventuality. Cataloguing rules will develop as the data base is built, and the cataloguing manual should be seen as a work in progress. Curators should be consulted frequently to be sure that the conventions adopted for the computer are in keeping with practices in their field.

The curator has an important responsibility to identify the most accurate records from which data entry can be done. Now is the time to confess to the inadequacies of the card file you have been touting or to reveal the documentation you have secreted away in your own desk drawer.

Who should do the initial data entry? The decision will vary from museum to museum. To create the automated data base is likely to be a much larger task than maintaining it—that is, making corrections and adding records for new acquisitions. Ideally, the museum will assign a few people who can devote the majority of their time to the initial task, so that it will not drag on too long. Also, these cataloguers should stay with the project at least until the "first layer" of the data base is complete. They will be knowledgeable about the collections, the field, and scholarly practice as well as being precise and detail-oriented.

Computer cataloguing is not the ideal job for the one-afternoon-a-week volunteer or the eager undergraduate on his or her January work term, yet it is often to such people that the project falls because of budgetary constraints and the workload of the regular staff. If your museum cannot form a cadre of knowledgeable long-term cataloguers who can devote significant time to the project, it must substitute careful preparation of the data and then review by curators and the coordinator after the data are entered. In the long run, it may prove more economical to hire cataloguers who can be properly trained and then function with less supervision.

In some instances, the computer can be used to help point up discrepancies in the data. Information can be entered into a "temporary" data base (one not generally distributed) directly from existing manual records. The computer then can be instructed to print all the terms (known as values) that occur in a given field. Duplications—such as "bequeathed" and "bequest," or "donation" and "gift"—can be identified and a single preferred term selected. The computer can be instructed to find all occurrences of the terms to be eliminated and change them to the terms you de-

cide to keep. Data in this field are now "clean" and ready for distribution. The computer can, furthermore, be programmed to accept only accepted values, preventing the cataloguers from inadvertently using terms now abandoned. If conditions warrant, new values can be added.

As batches of records are entered, the curator should be asked to review and proofread them. This should be seen as a serious intellectual exercise. The early stages of data entry provide a



key opportunity to determine whether the system is reflecting the content of the information about the collection clearly and accurately. If not, the problems should be raised with the coordinator or in a committee of curators to see whether adjustments can be made.

Using the New System

Just as no one can predict all the problems that will arise during data entry, no one can anticipate all the uses to which the data base will be put. Until a quantity of data has been entered, the system can't be tested completely. Once the data base is established, however, the curator should use it as much as possible. Learn enough to understand what

A typical cataloguing dilemma: Is this watch (from the National Museum of American History) a scientific instrument, a costume, or a work or art? A curatorial department's focus often colors the way its holdings are catalogued, so museums should design some commonality into the data base.

the new system ought to do. Abandon those cards, and see whether the machine works. Feedback to the coordinator or consultant is crucial at this stage.

If you can't get the computer to answer your questions, ask a human being why not. Too often people assume their difficulty results from their own ignorance of computers. Alternatively, they may mentally assign the whole computer system to the garbage can. If you ask someone, you might be told that the system doesn't yet support that kind of inquiry, or you might learn how to execute that query the next time. Simultaneously, the coordinator will learn what features ought to be considered in designing future improvements or what needs to be explained more clearly in the instructions to users of the new system.

All users of the data base should read its user's manual and pass on their comments. If the text isn't clear, if there's too much jargon, or if the examples don't make sense to those who work in the field, make certain that the person preparing the manual knows.

One important aspect of implementation is determining who will have access to which data. Most modern systems allow for these decisions to be made on a field-by-field basis. Thus the registrar may be privileged to know insurance valuations, but the editor may not, whereas both would have access to data about an object's dimensions or frame. For reasons of security, a full curator may be allowed to see information about storage location that a junior member of the department may not. The cura-

tor should give honest advice about the needto-know of those on the staff and should respect security requirements.

Once the automated system is up and running, the curator has a responsibility to make certain that corrections and additions are fed into it. By now you will have invested a great deal into building an excellent data base. Don't ruin it by letting it become outdated. Just as responsibility for creating the initial data base is best centered in a few knowledgeable hands, the integrity of the existing system will best be maintained if all changes are made by one or a few people who know the cataloguing rules intimately. If the museum decides, however, to spread the responsibility for additions and updates to various offices (all curators, for example, updating their own records), problems can be reduced by having a thorough cataloguing manual, building internal controls into the system wherever possible, and having all modifications to the data base stored in a "temporary" data base where they can be reviewed by a single staff member well versed in the cataloguing rules before being put into circulation.

Nobody ever said computerizing your collection records would be easy, and the responsible curator must play an active, thoughtful, and thorough role in all three stages of the undertaking. Nonetheless, realize that your role properly draws on the expertise you already have—about your collections, your field, and the museum's procedures as they affect you. If you do your job well, the resulting data base will reward you many times over.

Still Not Convinced of the Wisdom of Computerizing Collections Data? Read On

If your collections are relatively small or, as curator, you know the collections well, you might question whether computerizing will be of sufficient use to be worth the time and effort required. Consider these points:

- Automation helps those on the staff who know the collections less well. The registrar, the publications director, or the volunteer at the information desk can ask the computer a question rather than telephoning you.
- The collection is likely to grow. What may be manageable right now might become too big to manage without automation in the future. It is wise to begin before the situation is out of control.
 - The computer can do boring,

repetitive tasks, freeing you to do more interesting ones. Lists, gallery labels, postcard captions, and photograph labels are all similar iterations of the same information, easily and accurately generated by machine.

- You can quickly update information. When an artist dies, four strokes on the keyboard could fill in the date of death in the record for every object by the artist that the museum owns, making the information instantly available to anyone on the staff who needs to know.
- and showing trends. Say your director is asked to testify before Congress on how gifts to the collection have changed as a result of changes in the
- tax law. The computer can quickly count how many gifts were received year by year, segregate them by type or source, and even—if you have entered valuations—analyze the aggregate dollar impact over time. Compiling such a report manually could take days; the computer can do it in minutes.
- Data bases can support new types of research. Studies that require obtaining a specific type of information about a large class of objects have heretofore been daunting because of the time it takes to search thousands of museum records by hand. As more museums develop data bases, research into complex topics will become more feasible and will be undertaken more readily.—S.F.

Fighting for Culture's Turf

Buffeted by the Actions of Theme Parks and Other 'Masqueraders,' Museums Now Are Struggling to Exercise Interpretive Domain Over Their Traditional Subject Matter

useums are continually seeking to understand their "image" as it is perceived by the nonmuseum world, by their various clienteles. Although many in the museum field (and in the public at large) have difficulty defining what a museum should be, other segments of our culture understand exactly what the compelling image of museums is and have in the past decade or so moved to co-opt those aspects of museums that have made them so enormously popular. I believe the problem is structural: Museums now must struggle for the power to continue to exercise interpretive domain over subject matter that once was essentially theirs alone. Rather than competing for markets, museums actually are competing for turf.

Preeminent on the horizon as a challenger is the theme park/amusement park community. The Walt Disney World/EPCOT complex is, of course, the flagship of this initiative but regional examples abound. Subjects traditionally dealt with in museums of natural history, anthropology, science, history, and even art now are found in amusement parks. One should not be surprised to learn that the Orlando Museum of Art recently borrowed an exhibit of African art from EPCOT, a significant turn of events. Grandiose technology funded by outsize admission fees and corporate sponsorship has produced interpretive elements that no museum can hope to rival for wizardry.

But high technology is not a necessary precondition for the encroachment of theme parks into museum identity. A number of parks include "cultural displays" such as traditional craft demonstrations within a general framework of amusement park rides. Dolly Parton's Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., is perhaps the outstanding example.

Like amusement parks, shopping complexes

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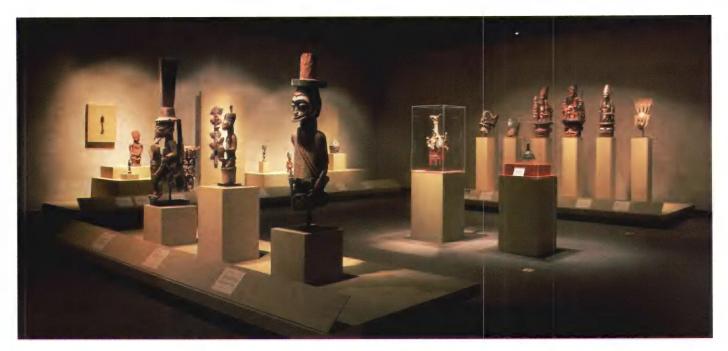
also have seized aspects of museum imagery. And so have department stores: Most museum professionals have, at one time or another, been approached by a retailer for the loan of objects for display, the underlying reason always being that the store wishes to ally its money-making enterprise with the cachet of the museum.

Today this effort is far more organized and invasive. Debora Silverman, writing in *Selling Culture: Bloomingdale's, Diana Vreeland, and the New Aristocracy of Taste in Reagan's America*, says, "Mass market moguls . . . are cultural cannibals; they absorb the historical materials of art museum exhibitions for the purpose of advertising, public relations, and sales campaigns." And when museums willingly participate in this process, says Silverman, "Rather than the domain in which to express the moral brake on conspicuous consumption, the museum becomes the extension of the department store and another display case for the big business of illusion making."

The fear, then, is that the museum—because of its need for popularity, importance, and money—is essentially up for sale to those who know how to make a profit from the museum image.

This problem is perhaps even more complex. Edith Mayo, curator of political history at the National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C., says the escalating costs of exhibitions is making outside, particularly corporate, sponsorship a necessary corollary of the exhibit process. And while certain exhibition concepts are attractive to business and receive easy funding, other topics, particularly those dealing with issues of minorities and women, are not attractive to corporate decision makers, are difficult to fund, and therefore are difficult to complete. In this sense, business becomes a silent partner in determining a museum's interpretational content.

Similarly, the Whitney Museum in New York has for nearly two decades been building small branch museums in New York City and the surrounding suburbs. These galleries are housed



Overleaf and above: As these African sculptures on loan to the Orlando Museum of Art from Walt Disney's EPCOT Center demonstrate, theme parks are approaching subjects traditionally dealt with in museums.

within corporate structures and sponsored by the parent companies. One can ask this question: Are these companies serving as outposts for the museum, or is the museum a glittery element in corporate image-making? If the latter is the case, then museums may be in for a relationship in which the health of the parent company and the support of top executives remain key but unpredictable variables.

Corporations are not the only business organizations to find museums useful. Retailers not only have been independently developing "museums" but also finding it financially advantageous to make them nonprofit. In one instance, a shopping center developer created a museum to attract shopper traffic, thereby making his unrented spaces more attractive to potential store operators. That such a thing can happen suggests that museums in their search for popularity have diminished the public understanding of what a museum really is.

Best of Times, Worst of Times

So if image is taken as meaning "perceived identity," then museums are in for a rough time. In this sense, it is both the best and worst time for museums; at the very moment of their greatest success, museums see their most popular aspects being subsumed by organizations that, largely because of their economic muscularity, seem difficult for museums to compete with. And the diffusion into the for-profit world of the special qualities heretofore found only in museums threatens to weaken museums generally in the culture.

As other types of organizations—theme parks, department stores, corporate galleries—take on characteristics of "museumness," it

makes it more difficult for the public to identify the real museum—or at least to point convincingly to the dividing line between the museum and these masqueraders. Rebuilding this dividing line represents a genuine challenge to both image and identity.

To be sure, these problems are not new. The difference today is one of intensity. Museums are captives of their own success. The public is coming to museums in unprecedented numbers and expecting a high-quality experience, however that might be defined. This costs money, and usually more of it than a museum can generate by its own operations. Any dilution of the appeal of museums or any sense that a similarly authentic experience can be had elsewhere will only exacerbate this situation.

I think, fortunately, that the public genuinely wants a museum experience and will only accept it in a museum, if all else is equal. The public can tell the difference between Conner Prairie Museum and Frontierland.

It is useful to consider for a moment the nature of the challenge to museum image that these masqueraders present. In the case of theme parks, that challenge appears at first to be a technological one. If, museums seem to say, we could have access to the interpretational magic of theme parks, our audience would respond. Such a feeling probably explains the popularity of the Dinamation dinosaurs. And the recent history of theme park development suggests that, technologically speaking, there is a newer thrill just around the corner. It is not without meaning that the most dated section of Disneyland is the one called Tomorrowland.

I believe that the real challenge theme parks

present museums, then, is not inherently technological but conceptual. Museum exhibits are too often creator oriented rather than visitor oriented. The continuing debate over labeling in art museums is a good example. The fact that the public is obviously not interested in playing guessing games about art has not yet closed out the debate. Similarly, most exhibitions of dinosaurs tell us a good deal more about the discipline of vertebrate paleontology than the lives of dinosaurs. Exhibitions of prehistoric native American life often center on displays of stone artifacts arranged by periods meaningful only to archaeologists and anthropologists. Theme parks are not afraid to pose and then answer the "stupid" questions that the kid in class hesitates to ask.

We see technology as meeting the challenge, but it's not the hardware or software (though that often helps as an image enhancer) that is the challenge. It's the marketing style. Theme park exhibits answer the questions people want answered, not the ones museum people necessarily want to answer. In this sense, an actor on the streets of Colonial Williamsburg may well serve as much as a film on life in Virginia's first colonial capital.

The Dinamation International Corp. seems to understand this situation better than almost anyone else. After establishing its credentials by renting animated dinosaurs to a number of museums (including the Smithsonian), Dinamation now is poised to open the first of a projected nationwide series of interactive science museums. According to the information available on this venture, these will not be solely dinosaur museums but will borrow heavily from the repertory of youth museums and science museums. If this enterprise is successful, it is likely to have a serious impact on the fortunes of museums in the affected geographic areas. Success, particularly to the extent that these institutions rely on nondinosaur elements, also may highlight the need to pay attention to marketing style as opposed to technology.

Then, too, there is the challenge of the department store and other museum-style retailers. As we all know, the development of the department store was a key factor in the modernization of exhibition design in museums. Because department stores were and still are essentially self-service operations, the merchandise itself had to serve the function once performed by a clerk—namely selling. Today museums have become far more adept at making objects look luscious than the department stores from whom they learned the technique. It seems to me that this is precisely why stores are so successful with museum-style promo-

tions. Museums and department stores may copy each other's visual codas, but the objects are supposed to say different things in the two settings. In a store, the object is supposed to say "buy me," while in the museum, the object's message is "learn from me." We should not be surprised that if a store can make an object look so good that it says "learn from me" but can also be purchased and taken home, it will be successful.

This, to me, explains why museums must have stores, beyond any educational or profit-making motives, and why they must be beautiful. For a culture that produces bumper stickers that say things like "Shop till you drop" and "The one who dies with the most toys wins," it can be psychologically debilitating for visitors to realize that in a museum with no gift shop, a buying experience will not follow the looking experience. That so many of our museum visitors go to the shop first, or at least as early as is politely possible, suggests a priority that needs to be acknowledged.

Objects as Power and Glory

Having considered the nature of these challenges to museum image, it might be useful to consider some ways to meet them. First, I think that museums need to reaffirm the primacy of the object. The object is the power and the glory of the museum and, if interpreted well, separates the museum from challengers and establishes the museum's image as the repository of the real thing. Admittedly, this is not always the most popular view. The director of a well-known children's museum referred to the idea that museums are nothing without their objects as a "Doomsday" notion. But it is exactly the kinds of museums that don't center on objects-youth museums and science and technology centers—that are most susceptible to image erosion by competing organizations.

Second, I think that business can teach us some good lessons, ones they've been trying to for years. John Cotton Dana, director of the Newark Museum, wrote in 1917 that a firstclass department store was more like a good museum of art than any museums then available: "It is centrally located; it is easily reached; it is open to all at all the hours when patrons wish to visit it; it receives all courteously and gives information freely; it displays its most attractive and interesting objects and shows countless others on request; its collections are classified according to the knowledge and needs of its patrons; it is well lighted; it has convenient and inexpensive rest rooms; it supplies guides free of charge; it advertises itself The real challenge theme parks present museums is not technological but conceptual. Museum exhibits are too often creator oriented rather than visitor oriented. Theme parks are not afraid to pose and then answer the 'stupid' questions that the kid in class hesitates to ask

Museum News: March/April 1991 63

widely and continually; and it changes its exhibits to meet daily changes in subjects of interest, changes of taste in art, and the progress of invention and discovery."

Evaluating Museums

Understanding the merchandising aesthetic is useful because the public evaluates a museum on much the same criteria as it does a store: Are the exhibits interesting (as opposed to correct or *au courant* in scholarship)? Are there comfortable chairs? Does it seem fashionable to be there? Is the food good in the restaurant? Is the atmosphere cheerful? Are the bathrooms clean? People don't care how well the store runs behind the scenes. They don't care if there is computerized billing or lockers for the employees or if the boss is an incompetent tyrant. What the public cares about is all up front, both for the store and for the museum.

It also is useful to understand that the best retailers offer the customer a recognizable aesthetic. McDonald's does this, and so does L.L. Bean. The Polo/Ralph Lauren Corp. is one of the best examples. The logo, the buildings, the advertising, the interior design of the stores (usually resembling an idealized English gentlemen's club), the merchandise itself, and its form of display all contribute to the construction of a core culture, a system of visible beliefs about what Polo/Ralph Lauren is that is marketed to the public.

How many museums have developed a core culture that can be translated into a system of visible beliefs that are reflected in exhibit design, signage, the content and appearance of the shop, the dress of the museum guides, the architecture of the buildings? Probably not many, but that might be changing. After a marketing study that rejuvenated the visitation and revenues of the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Mich., an interpretation committee was organized that "was chaired by the director of education and was comprised of representatives from the curatorial, exhibitions, special programs, and marketing and public relations departments. The group evaluates every new program proposal and always takes the marketing position into account, along with the museum's overall mission, when making its recommendations." Such an effort suggests one way in which core culture can be developed.

Further, while neither museums, the public, nor professional educators seem to be able to define—or at least understand the process—bow museums educate, the public nevertheless perceives the museum as an educator.

We must reinforce our image as educational institutions rather than hedge the issue out of

fear that we will seem dull and turn tourists away. Corporations may provide gallery space and amusement parks may make dinosaurs "come alive," but it is in museums where real education with objects takes place.

The problem is, of course, that even museums have difficulty defining the nature of the education process that occurs within our walls. In the future, particularly with the challenges they face from other sources, museums must be able to articulate the benefits and the results of the education process in museums to their audiences. But to do this, we also must reach out to other disciplines to actually understand how the education process works in museums. It is no longer enough to simply say, more out of hope than certainty, "We educate."

Museums also must become more economically self-sufficient. We are seeing this happen, or course, and in a number of directions from a greater reliance on marketing data to licensing agreements like that which Winterthur museum has recently undertaken to the Denver Children's Museum's little book entitled *Non-Profit Piggy Goes to Market*. As museums become more stable financially, they will be less susceptible to image erosion, because they will have fewer interests to please.

Finally, and most important, museums individually and collectively must be more attentive to the core culture of museumness if they are to thwart challenges. Admittedly, this idea sails against the prevailing winds of opinion. But I believe museums must focus on similarities rather than on differences. Most especially they must concentrate on developing and advertising their shared values, their core culture. Fans of the highly popular book In Search of Excellence, by Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman, will remember that in attempting to define good organization, they constructed a diagram they termed the McKinsey 7-S Framework, so called because the authors were working for McKinsey and Co., a management consulting firm. The diagram was in the form of a hexagon with six key variables positioned at each corner. Those variables were structure, strategy, skills, staff, style, and systems. But at the center, holding everything together, was shared values.

Gap Between Operations and Philosophy

The fact is, however, that museums have had difficulty in expressing shared values, and this problem is likely to increase if not checked. In today's environment, museums are pressed toward earned-income enterprises and vigorous programming efforts, and some museums are simply much better at it than others. The result of this pressure has been to create

Understanding the merchandising aesthetic is useful because the public evaluates a museum on much the same criteria as it does a store: Is it interesting? Are there comfortable chairs? Is the atmosphere cheerful? People don't care how well the store runs behind the scenes: what they care about is all up front

a far greater gap in operations and philosophy among museums than Lawrence Vail Coleman could have dreamed of in 1939 when he wrote *The Museum in America*. And as the most vigorous and capable museums, using techniques learned from the for-profit sector, broaden the concept of what the word museum can mean, museums generally will be open to the inroads of those who can merchandise the profitable aspects of museumness while eliminating what represent a drain.

This relationship will subject authentic museums to some change in form. Change should be anticipated and encouraged, yet if change is to occur, it should be museums that control and direct it rather than having it imposed on the field by those seeking a profit. To use an old business cliché, museums as a group should be proactive rather than reactive.

Certainly for-profit ventures begun by profitoriented companies seeking a public relations benefit cannot be trusted in the long term to do the job of museums. When a business does not show a profit, it closes its doors or, if the company is sufficiently large, it cuts off the unprofitable part. The business and cultural climate in the past two decades has encouraged companies to become involved in areas and activities traditionally thought of as the domain of museums. But it should be equally clear that if business generally experiences lows—or as marketing styles change—arts-oriented activities or promotions are likely to be jettisoned.

So while anyone can replicate the museum environment or "look" for the short, economically favorable term, the watchwords of the museum field have been endurance and commitment. The mission of real museums is lasting, subject to the marketplace in degree but not in kind. If, for example, America's great art treasures were not housed in nonprofit museums, they would surely now follow the centuries-honored geoeconomic tradition of art chasing cash. The emphasis of the museum on artifact rather than auction value has provided stability in an unstable world.

But if endurance and commitment are a given, vast public popularity for museums is not. Most people working in the field today have difficulty remembering a time when museums were not wildly popular institutions, yet this is largely a post-World War II phenomenon. At the turn of this century, many museums were simply minor adjuncts to urban public libraries, and three centuries ago, vestigial museums were an aristocratic proclivity only. There is no reason to think that this cycle has permanently ceased to function and will remain forever on the high side. In fact, a de-

cline in public popularity is to be expected, and when that happens, the for-profit emulation of museums will cease, too, an event that could cause terrible damage to museums if the public does not comprehend what is happening. If museums maintain a strongly defined and widely understood public role, they can remain viable. But if their image is eroded in good times, their long-term survivability as a distinct cultural entity could be threatened in less favorable climates.

This is a time, then, when U.S. museums must enunciate the difference between the real and the imitation. Museums must concentrate on identifying and articulating the attributes they share and marketing them in ways that will promote the public consumption of genuine museumness. These values should express not only the core culture of particular museums but also express the core culture of *all* museums. Only when both sets of values match can real museums expect long-term institutional success in fending off the challenges of masqueraders. \square

Tell Us Where You Stand

To ensure their survival, argues the author of the accompanying article, museums must assert their "museumness" and distinguish themselves from "masqueraders"—theme parks, department stores, and other segments of the for-profit sector that find it profitable to exploit aspects of the museum environment. If cultural institutions give up too much of their turf to these faux museums, he suggests, they risk making it more difficult for the public to differentiate the real from the imitation—and, in the process, risk going the way of dinosaurs and the Hula Hoop when fashion dictates. Our Your Vantage Point question:

Is it possible (and realistic) for museums to retain interpetive control over traditional subjects while still applying some hard-won lessons from their commercial competitors? If so, how?

Let us and your colleagues know what you think. To air your opinion, turn to the reader service card facing page 96, and write your comments on the card. Then drop the card in the mail (we've already paid the postage). We'll collect your comments and report on them in the May/June issue of the magazine.

Thanks.

ARE YOUR STORAGE SYSTEMS AS OBSOLETE AS THE THINGS YOU STORE?



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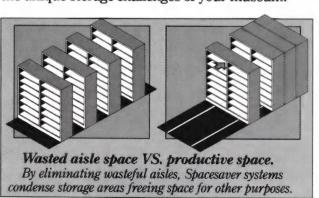
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Forces of Change

Like Denver's City Builders, Museums Today Must Learn to Take The Long View and Look at Change as Unprecedented Opportunity

n the wake of a national economic depression in 1857, prospectors responding to rumors of gold set off for the central Rocky Mountains. After weeks of back-breaking panning brought no pay dirt, many of the men became discouraged and began the long trek back to Kansas City. But in early July 1858, at the confluence of Cherry Creek and the South Platte River, those few prospectors who had refused to go back empty-handed were rewarded with the sparkle of precious metal.

Word of the discovery spread eastward quickly, and within six months, a thousand people had gathered at the site. In the following spring and summer, thousands more traveled to the region in response to two desires—that of economic advancement (a quick fortune) and the wish to build something long lasting and of value.

Much was at stake in the venture. Many would get their piece of the action and leave, but others understood that the forces of change brought opportunities to shape their world. Greeting the vision of manifest destiny with hard work and sharp business acumen, pioneers set about turning a makeshift tent city into a stable, inviting community.

In the ensuing century-and-a-half, Denver's city builders have come in all sizes, shapes, and ages; with many racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds; and with varying educational and economic footings. Some, like the earliest prospectors, have been motivated by the prospects of financial gain, and others have had more altruistic motives. The best of them shared important qualities: the ability to look at change as opportunity, to take the long view of events and their consequences, and to turn misfortune into a challenge.

William Byers's entry into Denver, for example, brought with it the city's first press and the publication of the *Rocky Mountain News*. Byers's reasons for establishing the newspaper are a typical combination of private and public motives: "We wished to collect and set forth reliable information, . . . we wished to mold and organize the new

population, and . . . we thought it would pay."

Through the decades, Denver has been shaped by changes in the technology of transportation and communication. Its economic ups and downs have been linked to the challenges and changes associated with agriculture, extractive industries, tourism and health industries, and business and information services. Its social climate has been shaped by the influx of new residents, from European immigrants to "yuppies." Each economic and social force has brought with it a rethinking—and sometimes a restructuring of the urban experience.

Like cities, museums have required builders and pioneers. Usually built on an overriding theme—like the discovery of gold—museums have required people of vision, conviction, energy, and dedication to place the institutions on sound footing. To survive the roller coaster of contemporary political opinions and economic swings, museum professionals must continue to think of themselves as builders.

We must recognize that the health of one institution is, in part, dependent upon others. We must recognize the importance of establishing and maintaining communication within the profession and with our constituents, of having our houses in order, of enfranchising the racial, ethnic, and economic groups to whom museums have not spoken in the past. We must value cooperation and seek to form partnerships and coalitions that will benefit museums and communities.

In short, we must seek long-term solutions—establishing programming and funding diversity so we can withstand long-term pressures. We must be able to envision the museums we want and meet the forces of change with courage and creativity. \square

Georgianna Contiguglia is curator of decorative and fine arts at the Colorado Historical Society, Denver. By Georgianna Contiguglia

Deliberating in Denver

Museum Colleagues Will Gather to Debate the Issues and Take Advantage of Professional Services at AAM's 86th Annual Meeting

By Nina G. Taylor

useum professionals are like everyone else: You don't need to be reminded of the forces of change at work in the world around us. But museum people do have a stake in the "Forces of Change"—the theme of AAM's 1991 annual meeting, to be held in Denver May 19–23—as those changes shape the institutions you serve. Through educational program sessions and general sessions, the meeting will allow you to focus on the many internal and external factors that are changing the face of America's museums.

Issues of cultural diversity, evolving ethical standards, expanded outreach activities, and collecting/deaccessioning policies are just a few of the internal forces that will be examined and discussed during program sessions.

Nina G. Taylor is editorial assistant of Museum News.

External forces—such as increased political scrutiny and changing U.S. demographics—also will be the agenda.

Not all sessions, of course, will emphasize the forces of change. With more than 100 program offerings, attendees will be able to choose plenty of sessions of a more practical, nuts-and-bolts nature: "Balance Sheet Planning Strategy" and "Museum Archives: Gaining Control of Your Institution's Records" are just two examples.

Educational sessions specially tailored for the beginning professional, highlighted in the preliminary program, are a new feature of this year's annual meeting. These sessions will cover a variety of topics, including employment contracts and exhibit evaluation.

Another valuable feature is the *Market-place of Ideas*. Held on Monday, May 20, the marketplace will make experts in many disciplines available for informal discussions with meeting attendees. Participants may

As a city experienced in reckoning with the forces of change, Denver (depicted here in a 1922 photograph) makes an appropriate setting for AAM's annual meeting.



The following Denver-area institutions are participating in AAM's 1991 annual meeting. The list is current as of mid-February.

A.R. Mitchell Memorial Museum and Gallery
Aurora History Museum
Baca House
Bloom House
Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site
Black American West Museum
Boulder Historical Society and Museum
Buffalo Bill Memorial Museum
Centennial Village Museum
Central City Opera House Association
Cheyenne Mountain Zoological Park
Children's Museum of Denver
Colorado Historical Society
Colorado School of Mines Geology Museum

Colorado Ski Museum-Ski Hall of Fame Colorado Springs Fine Art Center Colorado Springs Pioneer Museum Denver Art Museum Denver Botanic Gardens, Inc. Denver Museum of Natural History Denver Zoological Gardens El Pueblo Museum Estes Park Area Historical Museum Fort Collins Museum Four Mile High Historic Park Gallery of Contemporary Art Georgetown Society, Inc. Gilpin County Historical Society Museum Golden Landmarks Association Greeley Municipal Museum Hiwan Homestead Museum Lakewood's Historical Belmar Village Littleton Historical Museum Longmont Museum

Loveland Museum and Gallery Lowry Heritage Museum Mizel Museum of Judaica Molly Brown House Museum of Outdoor Arts Museum of the American Numismatic Association Museum of Western Art Nicolaysen Art Museum Pearce/McAllister House and Denver Museum Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame and American Cowboy Museum Rocky Mountain National Park Rocky Mountain Quilt Museum Sangre de Cristo Arts and Conference Center Turner Museum U.S. Air Force Academy Visitors Center University of Colorado Museum

take part in as many sessions as they like.

A "town meeting" general session, scheduled for May 22, is another new meeting feature. Microphones in the audience will allow meeting delegates to join in the discussion of "Excellence and Equity: Defining the Public Dimension of Museums," a report prepared by the AAM Task Force on Education.

Featured speakers at the meeting include Marlene Wilson and Richard West. Wilson, president of Volunteer Management Associates, will discuss the techniques of effectively managing volunteers; West, director of the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., will speak on minority group representation in museums, collections accessibility, and repatriation of Native American burial and ceremonial materials.

In addition to education sessions, a variety of daily features are available at the convention center. Don't get so caught up in the program discussions that you forget to take advantage of these opportunities:

The *exhibit hall* will be the largest ever this year. See pages 70–74 for details.

The *AAM booth* will be staffed by AAM employees ready to answer your questions about association programs and services.

The AAM museum professional bookstore will be open and stocked with books, monographs, videotapes, and audiotapes for browsing. The bookstore offers an unprecedented selection of professional literature covering legal issues, ethics, governance, collections care, exhibit planning and design, personnel, volunteers, visitor studies, security, facilities management, public relations, and marketing.

AAM's placement service will allow institutions to post job openings free of charge. Those individuals seeking employment should bring plenty of resumés.

Counseling services also will be available. Representatives from AAM Accreditation, MAP, Technical Information Services, and International programs—as well as representatives from federal agencies—will be on hand to offer information and advice on museum practices, grant application procedures, and international partnerships.

Videotapes produced by museums will be available for viewing in the *museum living room*. Scheduled viewings of selected tapes are featured, as are chances to browse through the tapes and view them at your leisure.

Winning entries in the 1991 AAM Museum Publications Competition, the only national, juried design competition for museums of all kinds, will be prominently displayed in the exhibit hall.

Volunteers at the *hospitality and information booth* will help you take advantage of all the "Mile High City" has to offer. They will be available to answer your questions about Denver's public transportation, restaurants, and more.

Don't let the forces of change overwhelm you. Be a part of them—in Denver, May 19–23!

For more information about the 1991 AAM annual meeting (or to register), contact the Meetings and Continuing Education department, AAM, 1225 Eye St. N.W., Suite 200, Washington, D.C. 20005; (202) 289-9113; FAX (202) 289-6578. □

Plan to Visit Each of These 1991 Exhibitors

For five action-packed days, May 19–23, AAM will hold its 86th Annual Meeting in Denver. This year, more than 130 exhibitors will display and demonstrate products and services of special interest to museum professionals. What follows is a brief description of exhibitors as of mid-February.

For your convenience, the exhibitors are listed in alphabetical order, and their booth number(s) appear above the company name. To help you plan your schedule at the annual meeting, please take a minute to note those you especially want to visit. Also note the names of company representatives who will be available to answer your questions. Those exhibitors who have placed ads in all three annual-meeting related publications are highlighted in color below. Check the floor plan in your Annual Meeting Program for specific booth locations.

And if you can't come to Denver? Please refer to this list as a guide the next time you're considering the purchase of a product or service for your museum.

Booth 616

ABBEVILLE PRESS, INC.

488 Madison Ave., 23rd Floor New York, N.Y. 10022 (212) 888-1969, ext. 866

Abbeville Press Inc. offers high-quality illustrated books on all topics important to museums, including fine art, art history, design, architecture, and more.

Company Representative: Myrna Smoot

Booth 501

ACADEMIC ARRANGEMENTS ABROAD

50 Broadway New York, N.Y. 10004 (212) 514-8921

Academic Arrangements Abroad is known for imaginative travel planning, solid educational content, and excellent on-site performance.

Company Representatives: Harriet Friedlander, William Roan, Rosemary Caulk

Booth 420

ACADEMIC TRAVEL ABROAD, INC.

3210 Grace St. N.W. Washington, D.C. 20007 (202) 333-3355

Academic Travel Abroad designs and operates tours for fine arts, natural history, and science museums as well as cultural and historical societies.

Company Representatives: David Parry, Ida Singelenberg

Booth 620

ACCESS INTERNATIONAL

432 Columbia St. Cambridge, Mass. 02141 (617) 494-0066

Access International offers a comprehensive, Digital VAX-based fund-raising package to museums. Company Representative: Courtney DeVries

Booths 603 605

ACOUSTIGUIDE CORP.

177 E. 87th St., Suite 200 New York, N.Y. 10128 (212) 996-2121

Acoustiguide provides recorded rours and audio interpretive services to museums worldwide, and merchandise and computerized ticketing systems consultation.

Company Representatives: Robert Cutler, Alan Klavans Melinda Eaton, Barbara Walker

Booth 303

AMARC DATA INTERNATIONAL PTY, LTD.

10 Pitt St., 2nd Floor Parramatta, N.S.W. 2150, Australia (612) 633-4922; FAX (612) 633-3779 In the US: (800) 542-0585; FAX (800) 542-0584

Museum collection records retrospective conversion specialists. Project management and on-site consulting. Company Representatives: Sharon Barnett, Doug Allen

Booths 600, 602

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS

41 E. 65th St. New York, N.Y. 10021 (212) 988-7700

AFA organizes and circulates art exhibitions and offers reduced-rate and specialized services to members. Company Representatives: Barbara Morgan, Mark Gotlob, Serena Rattazzi

Booth 504

ANTENNA AUDIO TOURS

P.O. Box 176 Sausalito, Calif. 94966 (415) 332-4862

Complete audio tour services including consulting, script writing, production, staff and hardware systems. Company Representatives: Chris Tellis, Heather Montanye Booth 720

ANTIOCH PUBLISHING CO.

888 Dayton St. Yellow Springs, Oh. 45387 (513) 767-7379

Booth 311

ANTIQUITY REPRODUCTION

40 Devonshire Road Ilford, Essex IG2 7EW, England (081) 590-8364

Antiquities reproduced by molding the original, making a master to cast as imitation jewelry; also gold, silver, bronze, resin, for museums to retail; scientific examination, education, exhibition.

Company Representative: Peter Shorer

Booth 424

ART SERVICES INTERNATIONAL

700 N. Fairfax St., Suite 220 Alexandria, Va. 22314 (703) 548-4554

Art Services International organizes and circulates fine art exhibitions for the museum community, handling arrangements for loans, shipping, insurance, and publicity. Company Representatives: Lynn Kahler Berg, Joseph Saunders

Brochure Exhibit

ARTECH, INC.

169 Western Ave. W. Seattle, Wash. 98119 (206) 284-8822

Fine art handling, packing, shipping, installation, display, and fixture fabrication.

Company Representatives: Mike Hascall, Ann O'Bery

Booth 410

ARTRANSPORT

8350 Bristol Court, Suite 114 Jessup, Md. 20794 (800) 336-4772

The museum community's source of local/long distance, climate-controlled, air-ride transportation, museum-quality crating and packing, and state-of-the-art climate/humidity controlled storage.

Company Representative: Wendy Jones

Booth 531

ASTROSYSTEMS, INC.

6 Nevada Drive Lake Success, N.Y. 11042 (516) 328-1600, (800) 645-8454

Astrosystems designs and builds custom audio-animatronics—AstroNomicals™—of virtually any character in any size. These systems combine extremely fluid, rapid, lifelike movement with synchronized audio.

Company Representative: Neil Kops

Booth 508

BLACKBAUD MICROSYSTEMS, INC.

900 Highway 17 By-Pass Mt. Pleasant, S.C. 29464 (803) 881-4700

Blackbaud is a leading supplier of computer solutions to nonprofit organizations. The Raiser's Edge for Membership Development, The Blackbaud Fund Accounting Series, and Planned Giving II operate on PCs in either a single user or network environment.

Company Representative: Tarek Heiba

Booth 308

BLAIR, DUBILIER & ASSOCIATES, INC.

4853 Cordell Ave., Suite 222 Bethesda, Md. 20814 (301) 951-9131

BDA provides custom software for museum information-management at off-the-shelf prices. Our modular systems manage collections, archives, exhibitions and tours, and assist development offices.

Company Representatives: Karen Dubilier, Gregory Blair

Booth 533

HUNTINGTON T. BLOCK INSURANCE

2101 L St. N.W. Washington, D.C. 20037-1585 (202) 223-0876

Huntington T. Block Insurance administers the Directors and Officers Liability Insurance program for AAM and also is a major fine arts broker for museums across the country.

Company Representative: Thad Merrill

Booth 613

BUTTERFIELD & BUTTERFIELD

220 San Bruno Ave. San Francisco, Calif. 94103 (415) 861-7500, ext. 337

Butterfield & Butterfield is the largest and oldest fullservice auction house in Western America. Our auction services range from estate disposition to museum deaccessioning.

Company Representatives: Carrea Uremovich, Patty Long Booth 604

BUTTERWORTH-HEINEMANN

80 Montvale Ave. Stoneham, Mass. 02180 (617) 438-8464

Meet the editors of *Museum Management and Curatorship.* They will be available at our booth to welcome contributors and authors—past, present, and future.

Company Representative: Kate McElbeney

Booth 422

CHEVALIER CONSERVATION

500 West Ave. Stamford, Conn. 06902 (203) 969-1980

Chevalier Conservation specializes in the wet cleaning, conservation, and restoration of antique tapestries and fine rugs. Our cleaning system is unique in the world and is especially designed for fragile, soiled textiles.

Company Representative: Stan Olshefski

Booth 727

CHRONICLE OF PHILANTHROPY

1255 23rd St. N.W., Suite 775 Washington, D.C. 20037 (202) 466-1234

Published biweekly, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* provides news for the nonprofit world, including the latest fund-raising trends, news of corporate and foundation giving, and a job opportunities section.

Company Representative: Kristen Pedisich

Booth 412

CINEBAR VIDEO PRODUCTIONS, INC.

714-B Thimble Shoals Blvd. Newport News, Va. 23606 (800) 874-2463

Broadcast-quality video production for educational outreach, fund raising, visitor orientation, and exhibits. Award-winning specialist in cost-effective museum and historical programming.

Company Representative: Bill Ball

Booth 621

COTTON EXPRESSIONS, LTD.

1579 N. Milwaukee Ave. Chicago, Ill. 60622 (312) 252-2545

Cotton Expressions specializes in fun and educational T-shirts for the museum market. Our shirts teach, entertain, and most important, inspire curiosity. Stop by our booth to see our imaginative designs.

Company Representatives: Matthew Alschuler, Roy Iwatake, Mabel Olivera

Booths 624, 626

CRYSTALIZATIONS SYSTEMS, INC.

1595A Ocean Ave. Bohemia, N.Y. 11716 (516) 567-0888

Storage systems. Aluminum construction. Any size. Moving panel systems for paintings, rolled textiles, and artifacts. All styles of cabinets. Designed, manufactured, and installed to meet your needs and requirements.

Company Representative: Patricia Ellenwood

Booth 400

CUADRA ASSOCIATES, INC.

11835 W. Olympic Blvd., Suite 855 Los Angeles, Calif. 90064 (213) 478-0066; (800) 366-1390

Cuadra STAR®—complete multiuser system for collections management/image retrieval in museums, historical societies, libraries, and archives

Company Representatives: Judith Wanger, Ilene Ingelmo

Booths 318, 320

CURATORIAL ASSISTANCE, INC.

113 E. Union St. Pasadena, Calif. 91103 (213) 681-2401

Specialists in traveling art exhibitions. We offer ArtSystems, integrated art services. Archival framing, custombuilt ArtCrates, and repro-photography of artworks.

Company Representatives: Graham Howe, Pilar Perez, Terry Joanis. Wendell Eckbolm

AAM SPC/Regional Association Exhibit Area

CURATORS COMMITTEE

c/o Corning Museum of Glass One Museum Way Corning, N.Y. 14830 (607) 937-5371

Booths 411, 413

CYRO INDUSTRIES

100 Valley Road, P.O. Box 950 Mt. Arlington, N.J. 07856 (201) 770-3000

Cyro Industries, the leading supplier of acrylic sheet, will exhibit ACRYLITE® GP and ACRYLITE FF acrylic sheet. ACRYLITE OP-2, offering UV protection, has all the qualities necessary in museum display materials.

Company Representatives: Ingrid Martin, Suzanne Schneider

Booth 403

DEATON MUSEUM SERVICES

4630 Quebec Ave. N. Minneapolis, Minn. 55428 (612) 535-5401

Complete museum exhibit services, including research, design, model-making, dioramas, murals, graphics, fabrication, and large-scale exhibit installation.

Company Representative: Craig Sommerville

Booth 221

DECTRON, INC.

4300 Poirier Blvd. Montreal, Quebec H4R 2C5, Canada (514) 334-9609

The Dry-O-Tron mechanical dehumidifier controls humidity and protects valuable artwork.

Company Representative: Mike Hurley

Booth 225

DRI-STEEM HUMIDIFIER CO.

14949 Technology Drive Eden Prairie, Minn. 55344 (612) 949-2415

Custom engineered humidifiers that address the concerns in today's museums: chemical-free humidification steam, energy efficiency, and tight control. Dri-Steem eliminates wetness in the ductwork.

Company Representative: Bob Engelking

Booth 321

EASTERN PRESS, INC.

654 Orchard St. New Haven, Conn. 06511 (203) 777-2353

Sheet-fed offset printing from pamphlets and brochures through full-length catalogues. Complete preparation services include Crosfield Studio System, four-, five-, and six-color press work, and full bindery capability.

Company Representatives: Richard Joslin, Cornelia Gaines

Booth 426

EDWIN SCHLOSSBERG, INC.

641 Sixth Ave., 5th Floor New York, N.Y. 10011 (212) 989-3993

Design firm specializing in conceptual planning; site master planning, exhibit programming, (design, fabrication, installation); interactive information systems for mixed-use developments.

Company Representative: Michelle Graham

Booth 614

ELECTROSONIC SYSTEMS, INC.

6505 City West Parkway Minneapolis, Minn. 55344 (612) 941-3236

Electrosonic offers products and services for the design, building, and installation of complete automated systems. These include audio, video, audiovisual, and show action, as well as tapeless audio.

Company Representative: Paul Giguere

Booth 705

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This Temporary Tax Break Could Make 1991 a Banner Year

By Richard Meltzer

ongress did no favors for the museum community when in 1986 it eliminated the deduction for gifts of appreciated property, such as artworks and museum-quality objects, for taxpayers subject to the alternative minimum tax. But this year—for one year only—Congress has partially restored this important tax break.

Congress included in its budget reconciliation bill a provision that restores the alternative minimum tax deduction for gifts of art, art objects, and certain other kinds of tangible personal property to the fair market value of the donated object as long as the gift is made in calendar year 1991 or a

taxable year beginning in 1991 (for those whose taxable year is not the same as the calendar year). Congress acted, in the words of the Senate Finance Committee report, to encourage the donation of property with "unique cultural or educational value" for the public's benefit.

The decision to limit the deductible treatment to gifts of appreciated prop-

Richard Meltzer is general counsel, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives. erty made in 1991 is attributable, in large part, to the fact that the House version of the budget reconciliation bill did not have a comparable provision. It was agreed, therefore, that the restoration of the rule would be made temporary, so that each house of Congress could revisit the issue.

In technical terms, the new provision modifies the definition of capital gain property for purposes of calculating the alternative minimum tax. The general rule is that the appreciated value of capital gain property is not deductible when contributed to a charitable organization by an alternative minimum taxpayer. Under the

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new rule, however, tangible personal property (such as artworks and objects) that is contributed in 1991 is not defined as capital gain property. Therefore, the fair market value—including appreciation—of tangible personal property is deductible under the alternative minimum tax if the property is contributed to a charitable organization that will use it to advance the organization's tax-exempt purpose: A painting given to an art museum is covered; one given to a charity whose mission is fighting cancer is not.

The new statutory language does not change the existing rules regarding percentage limitations and reductions. In general, these rules provide that a tax deduction for a contribution of capital gain property to a charitable organization (other than a private foundation) is limited to 30 percent of the donor's "contributions base." Any amount in excess of this limit may be carried over and deducted for as long as five additional years, subject to the percentage limit in each of those years. The existing rules also require that the first tax-deductible dollars must be attributed to the donor's "basis" in the donated property. Basis, unlike the amount of appreciation, is deductible under the alternative minimum tax.

To illustrate these provisions, consider this example: In Year One, a taxpayer with a contributions base (ordinarily equivalent to adjusted gross income) of \$100,000 is allowed a charitable contribution of \$30,000. The taxpayer makes a charitable contribution of property having an adjusted basis of \$50,000 and a fair market value of \$150,000. In Year One, the taxpayer's alternative minimum tax deduction equals \$30,000, the maximum percentage allowed. Because the basis of the contributed property exceeds the amount deductible for regular tax purposes by \$20,000, the taxpayer in Year Two is allowed to deduct the \$20,000 balance of his or her basis.

The question arose whether the carryover amount attributable to a gift of tangible personal property made in 1991 can be deducted under the alternative minimum tax in 1992. In the example, the carryover amount

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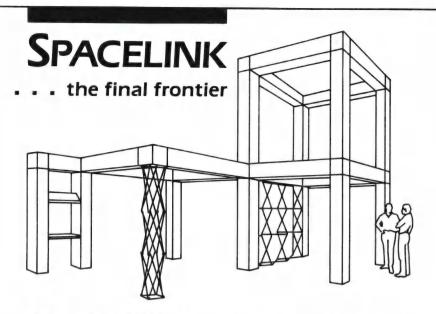
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is \$100,000, the amount by which the fair market value of the gift (\$150,000) exceeds the taxpayer's basis (\$50,000). The reason the question arose is that the new provision covers only tangible personal property contributions made in 1991. The question is important because, as the example indicates, the favorable treatment of the carryover amount is essential if, as Congress intended, donations of unique property for the public benefit are to be encouraged.

On December 14, 1990, the I.R.S. issued Revenue Ruling 90-111 to address this question. The I.R.S. concluded that the new rule forever forgives gifts of tangible personal property made in 1991 (or a taxable year beginning in 1991) from being classified as capital gain property. Therefore, if contributed property is not capital gain property, then the amount by which such property has appreciated is a deductible item under the alternative minimum tax preference in 1991 or in any year thereafter. Thus, the carryover amount may be deducted under the minimum tax during the entire five years.

Turning back to the example, the I.R.S. ruling means that if Year One is 1991, the taxpayer is able to deduct an additional \$10,000 in 1992, and three successive \$30,000 tax deductions in 1993, 1994, and 1995 under the alternative minimum tax. By the end of the carryover period, the taxpayer will have deducted the entire fair market value of his or her gift. This assumes that the taxpayer's contributions base is \$100,000 in each of the succeeding years and that the taxpayer makes no additional charitable contributions.

Unfortunately, this temporary tax provision comes too late for some artworks and art objects. Nevertheless, the new law clearly represents a breakthrough for museums, their contributors, and the public. The potential for gifts of substantial importance and public value in 1991 is great because it coincides with an increase in the individual alternative minimum tax rate from 21 percent to 24 percent. If this potential is realized, we will be able to look back on 1991 as a year in which objects of significant artistic and cultural patrimony were preserved rather than lost.

Museums Can Reach for High Standards *and* Broad Appeal

By Gary Kulik

Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in the United States Lawrence W. Levine, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988. 306 pp., softbound \$12.95

Curators and Culture: The Museum Movement in America, 1740–1870 Joel J. Orosz, Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1990. 317 pp., hardbound. \$34.95

Two trends are everywhere evident in U.S. museums, and have been for more than a generation. First, museums have shown a growing commitment to public education, manifested

in the new importance attached to exhibitions, audience analysis, and the enhanced status of museum designers and educators. Second, they have demonstrated an increasing willingness to cross traditional lines of discipline and speciality.

Partisans of these trends have a tendency to see themselves as the bringers of light to museums that have

Gary Kulik is assistant director for academic programs, National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C. long been dark and lifeless. Opponents remember a golden age of curatorial prerogative and lofty high-mindedness, when "standards" were clear and where everything and everyone—including the public—were in their places.

For those unsatisfied with those competing, but equally self-serving, visions of the past, these two books may help. Both shed light on a past that is far more varied and complex than either of these visions would have it.

Lawrence W. Levine's *Highbrow/ Lowbrow* is a strikingly original interpretation of the emergence of "high"

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culture in late 19th-century America. Levine, a distinguished American historian and MacArthur Prize Fellow, wrote the first draft of the book as the William Massey Lectures in the History of American Civilization at Harvard University.

For most of the 19th century, Levine argues, Americans shared a broad public culture that included Shakespeare and the opera, the theater and the concert hall, painting and sculpture. The sharp divisions that we now assume are common between high and low, popular and elite cultures did not yet exist. Musical performances were eclectic, combining opera and classical pieces with marches and popular airs such as "Oh, None Can Love Like an Irish Man." The theater typically included scenes from Shakespeare followed by a farce and interspersed with acrobats, singers, or minstrels. Museums displayed paintings and sculpture alongside historical icons, mastodon bones, and stuffed birds. Audiences, especially theater audiences, were deeply engaged and demonstrative.

Through a process that Levine labels the "sacralization of culture," much of this would change. Shakespeare increasingly became a "sacred author," performed in special theaters "catering to a discreet clientele" who were expected to take their Shakespeare straight, unaccompanied by the customary divertissements. The legitimate theater became the theater of an elite, and vaudeville came to serve the working class. Opera came to be performed largely for the fashionable in ornate opera houses and in Italian or German. Men such as Henry L. Higginson, the controlling force behind the Boston Symphony, would demand a purifying of symphonic music and an end to light fare—and then would write the checks necessary to an orchestra that no longer could support itself. The Smithsonian Institution's first Secretary, Joseph Henry, long resisted using the Smithson bequest to fund popular education. The Smithsonian's collections were to be studied by scholars, not exhibited to "gratify an unenlightened curiosity."

A similar process affected art museums. Levine draws tellingly on Paul

DiMaggio's research on Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. Incorporated in 1870, it was intended to be a popular institution in the widest sense of the term, as its incorporation papers stipulated. To that end, it gladly displayed architectural casts "of the many treasures of Antique and Medieval Art." Its purpose was explicitly educational. By 1909, the casts were gone forever, replaced not just by originals but by a new philosophy. According to Benjamin Ives Gilman, its secretary, a "museum of science is in essence a school; a museum of art is in essence a temple." The long reign of hushed voices, velvet ropes, minimal labels, and intrusive guards had begun.

Levine traces the ways in which new audiences were created and educated, trained in habits of deference and order. Orchestra patrons were to be silent; the users of parks quiet and decorous. As public life became more fragmented, a process accelerated by immigration, culture itself became more fragmented. Matthew Arnold. among others, would sort out the fragments arranging them as so many hierarchically ordered jewels. Despite the rhetoric of reaching the masses, the new spokesmen for culture, Levine argues, "were less missionaries than conservators, less bent upon eradicating the cultural gap between themselves and the majority than on steadfastly maintaining that gap."

Notions of high and low culture have remained remarkably powerful. Levine argues in an epilogue, though he also makes clear that these categories have recently "softened and overlapped." Art and music have become increasingly eclectic, blurring the boundaries between popular culture and the cultures of high art. It is this process that has incurred the wrath of critics such as Allan Bloom. whose strident voices call out for a return to fixed, immutable, and thoroughly ahistorical categories of culture. Levine's work makes clear that our received notions of high and low art are cultural and historical construc-

Levine is at his best in describing the broad contours of change at the turn of the century. He does not offer a sustained and convincing causal analysis. Nor does he manage to capture the protagonists of these culture wars in anything more than fleeting quotations. Why did upper middle class defenders of culture care so deeply about these matters? What was at stake? And why were they so successful? Did workers and immigrants oppose these changes, or did they by their own conscious actions, choosing vaudeville and the early movies over opera, for example, consciously accelerate them? If Levine has not addressed all the important questions, he has offered a richly creative and original exploration into the deep structures of American cultural history and has presented his arguments with the kind of flair and writerly grace that will appeal to a broad readership.

Joel Orosz's book, *Curators and Culture*, is a useful complement to Levine's. It is the work of a scholar educated in the graduate program at Case Western University and now employed by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. Its great virtue is its immersion in the records of 11 important 18th and 19th-century institutions from the var-

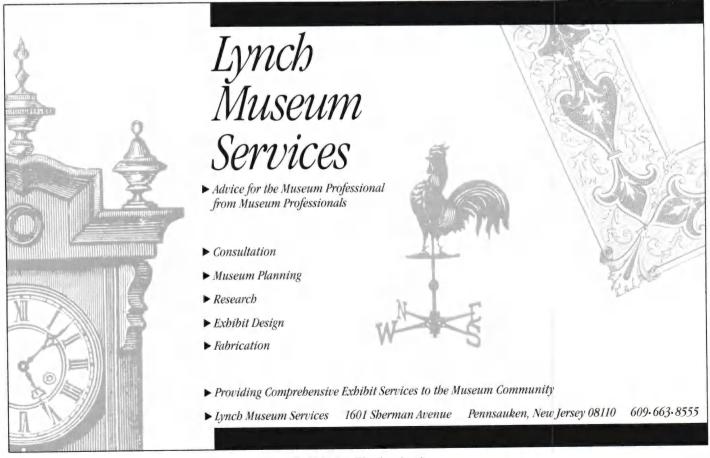
ious Peale museums to the Wadsworth Atheneum, the Academy of Natural Sciences, and the National Museum of the Smithsonian Institution.

Orosz seeks a middle ground between those writers and scholars who have dismissed America's first museums as mere cabinets of curiosity and those who have condemned its mid 19th-century museums as bastions of privilege. The early museums—especially the Peale museums of Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York-were far more concerned with scholarship, Orosz argues, than the conventional stereotype would have it. And the later museums were marked less by elitism than by a creative tension between scholarship and public education that Orosz calls the "American Compromise," a particularly American synthesis that he claims continues to structure museum practice.

Orosz offers an elaborate developmental model of American museum history. The first century of that history, from 1740 to 1840, was marked by four stages; a founding period (1740–1780), in which the ideals of

the European cabinet were transplanted; then the era of the Moderate Enlightenment (1780-1800), marked by the optimistic efforts of the early national elite to teach the order and beneficence of the "Divine plan." The third era, the age of the Didactic Enlightenment (1800-1820), was a period of reaction in which the elite lost faith in democracy and used museums as "guardians of the social order and means of social control." After 1820, the rising middle classes were in the saddle, and museums became centers of popular self-education. This Age of Egalitarianism was superseded in 1840 by another reaction, fostered by the rise of professional scientists for whom research took precedence. The Age of Professionalism lasted only a decade and was followed by the Age of the American Compromise, in which formerly professional and elitist museums reached out to embrace popular education.

The great virtue of Orosz's approach lies less in the details than in his general depiction of a complex and contested cultural history marked



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both by periods of reaction and periods of democratic faith. Orosz makes clear that the history of American museums has not been unilinear.

His approach, however, is altogether too mechanical, his eras too neatly bracketed by round numbers. His agents of change are little more than caricatures, and his causal arguments too frequently rely on such reifications as "the American democratic culture." When Orosz tries to place changes in museums in the context of larger changes in national life, readers would do better to move rapidly to his close studies of museums themselves.

The book ends on an optimistic note. Had Orosz extended his analysis past 1870, he might have been less sanguine about the American Compromise. Some art museums, as Levine documents, clearly moved aggressively back toward elitism. Some historical societies long remained bastions of privilege. As late as 1900, the elders of the Massachusetts Historical Society denied Samuel Eliot Morison, then a Harvard graduate student and a fellow Brahmin, permission to use the card catalogue.

Despite these criticisms, this is a book that should be read. It is, surprisingly, the first of its kind; that is, the first book to use primary sources to survey the first 130 years of American museum history. For that alone it deserves the close attention of readers.

Together, both Orosz and Levine help to provide historical perspective on the culture wars that have flared over the past several years. Battles between high culture and low, and over the very purpose of museums, have long marked American culture. Both Levine and Orosz, and especially Levine, are small "d" democrats. Both believe, and both books document. that democratic and popular cultural impulses have at times been creative ones and that a deep concern for public education and for reaching broad audiences is not incompatible with high cultural standards.

These are useful lessons at a time when the cultural right demands a return to elite standards of culture and ostensibly left-wing artists suggest that the public has no rights.

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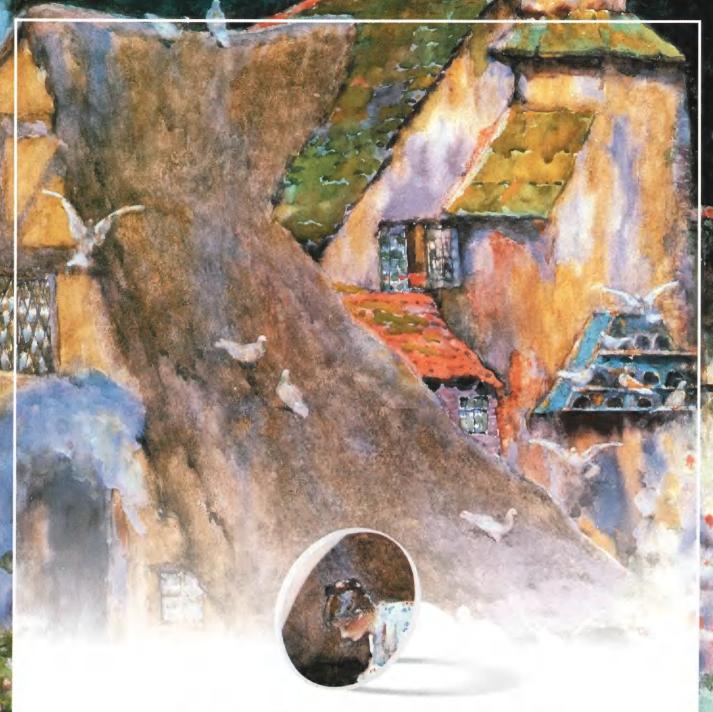


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Use Ultraviolet Filters to Neutralize an Invisible Enemy

By Steven Weintraub and Gordon Anson

ltraviolet radiation can be one of your collection's worst enemies, causing faded colors, yellowed varnish, and embrittled paper and textiles. It is an invisible enemy, but one that largely can be neutralized through a variety of strategies and products on the market.

Note first that ultraviolet (UV) radiation is a component of light, which is defined by its wavelength and measured in nanometers (nm). The visible portion of light lies between 400 and 700 nm; UV radiation includes wavelengths below 400 nm.

Incandescent lamps are very low in UV output. As a result, these lamps

are considered safe for general museum use without UV filters.

Tungsten halogen lamps, a type of incandescent lamp, are used by many museums for exhibition lighting because of their small size, long life, and high color temperature. But tungsten

Steven Weintraub is the owner of an environmental/conservation company, Art Preservation Services, in New York. Gordon Anson is chief lighting designer at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

halogen lamps also have a higher UV output than regular incandescent lamps and should be UV filtered.

Fluorescent lamps vary widely in UV output. Warm white lamps emit very little UV radiation; cool white lamps are higher in UV output; and full spectrum lamps produce the greatest amount of UV radiation among fluorescents. Filtering sleeves are available and should be used.

High intensity discharge (HID) lamps often are used in museums for special applications. These lamps have a very high UV output and must be used with a UV filter when lighting museum objects. Natural daylight has

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a high UV output as well and must be filtered to eliminate UV radiation.

UV filters can be placed at the source of light, such as a window or light fixture. A number of manufacturers produce plastic UV filtering sleeves for fluorescent lamps. Recently, UV filters have been produced for tungsten halogen lamps. To use these filters, the lamp must be housed in a fixture designed to hold such filters.

There also are a variety of "sun control" plastic films available that adhere directly to window glass. Although most sun-control films are designed to reduce visible and infrared energy from daylight, many films also are effective UV filters. Most manufacturers of these films offer a clear version designed exclusively for UV filtration. Most laminated safety glass used in building construction has some degree of UV filtration capacity.

Alternatively, special UV filtering plastics and glass are available that can be used in picture frames or exhibition cases.

Ask yourself two important questions before buying UV filters:

1. Are all UV filters equally effective? According to a study at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., which is evaluating a variety of UV filters and their long-term stability, important performance differences exist among the various films tested.

In general, materials specifically designated as UV filters remove most UV radiation below 380 nm. There are large variations in performance, however, in the region of 380 to 400 nm. Because this region of UV can cause a great deal of damage, it is important to choose the correct filter. This is especially true for daylight applications, because natural light is rich in this part of the energy spectrum.

Unfortunately, most manufacturers specify UV performance up to 380 nm, and on that basis claim 99 percent effectiveness. Therefore, it is difficult to make a decision solely on the basis of manufacturer-supplied specification. This is why René de la Rie, head of the Scientific Research Department at the National Gallery, recommends checking all UV absorbers before they are put into service.

Guidance from your museum's conservation department or a professional conservator should be sought before installing UV filtering materials for daylight applications. Contact other museums similar to yours and ask about their experiences with UV filters as well.

2. How long will a UV filter last? The lifetime of filters cannot accurately be established. There are few reported tests of aged UV filters. It has been our experience, though, that among the various UV filters that have been evaluated-including UV filtering fluorescent sleeve, UV filtering picture framing plastic, and UV filtering sun control films-these materials continue to perform as effective UV filters after several years of use.

Generally, the need to replace such materials stems from the failure of their mechanical properties, such as bond failure of sun control film to the glass or embrittlement of UV sleeves for fluorescent lamps. Although the museum staff should check the performance of such materials on a random basis with a UV meter after several years of use, there is no need to replace these materials unless they can be shown to be ineffective.

At the moment, only one UV monitor designed for museum applications is available—the Crawford UV meter. This meter comes in two models, which cost \$900 and \$1,185. Because of their expense, you might think twice about buying one. If your museum uses artificial sources of light exclusively (and proper filtration), it is not necessary to constantly monitor UV radiation. In this instance, you might arrange to borrow a monitor from another museum for short periods every few years.

If your museum's galleries depend extensively on natural light, where the UV level can be high, a meter is important, especially if UV filtering films are not used on the glass. The Crawford meter monitors the proportion of UV radiation to visible light, so it is critical to measure visible light with a foot-candle meter and determine whether the overall amount of light is safe or excessive. This is important because visible light causes damage to museum artifacts.



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In 1946 (as Now), Museums Were Urged to Plot a Global Path

Museum News, June 1946

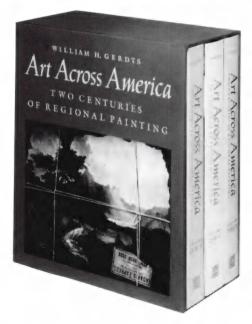
he pages of *Museum News* of yesteryear occasionally sparkle with the lucidity and acuity of cultural commentators and educators from outside the museum profession. Their comments serve to place the quotidian business of museums and of AAM in their larger historical contexts, sometimes fraught with parallels to and preparations for the current state of institutional life.

One such individual—the poet Archibald MacLeish—addressed the association's annual meeting of May 1946 and outlined the role museums should play in the post-World War II period, when the trauma of recent

hostilities and carnage gave way almost at once to the anxiety of yet another cataclysm-in-the-making between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Librarian of Congress from 1939 to 1944 and chairman of the U.S. delegation to the London Conference to draw up the UNESCO charter in 1945, MacLeish titled his talk, printed in *Museum News*, "Museums and World Peace."

"The whole question of the role of galleries and museums has become, in the last few years, a question of immediate concern to the generality of the citizens," he wrote, "and from a point of view rather different from that previously assigned to us. We are no longer concerned with the decisions of directors and boards of trustees and curators solely from the point of view of the museum visitor. We are concerned with their decisions as citizens of a new and dangerous world who have been compelled by events beyond our control, or any man's, to reexamine our institutions with a view to deciding how far and in what way they can help us to survive."

MacLeish stated clearly and repeatedly what museums need to do to ensure survival: "The work to be done is the work of building *in men's minds* the image of the world which now ex-





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ists in fact *outside* their minds—the whole and single world of which all men are citizens together."

He added, "If it is in the minds of men that the defense of the peace will be constructed, then those whose business is with the minds of men must make the defense of peace their charge."

MacLeish emphasized that nothing less than what now goes under the rubric of "globalism" must prevail. "What is required now," he wrote, "is a very different communication: a communication between mankind and men; an agreement that we are, and must conduct ourselves as though we were, one kind, one people, dwellers on one earth. What is required, in other words, is a recognition in common—a recognition by all of us to-

Museums serve as 'maps and charts of time . . . and the glass in which the total community of the human spirit can best be seen'

gether that the world is not all what we have been taught from the beginnings of history to think it, but something else—that the world is not an archipelago of islands of humanity divided from each other by distance and by language and by habit, but one land, one whole, one earth in which the hurt of one is the hurt of all and the menace of any part the menace of every part."

An obvious timeliness permeates much of the American poet's discussion that adds weight to MacLeish's injunction for museums to serve as the "maps and charts of time . . . [and] as the glass in which the total community of the human spirit can best be seen—can *alone*, perhaps, be seen."

Suspended over the AAM meeting MacLeish addressed was the Damocles sword of the Cold War; ironically, 45 years later, a different but equally threatening sword hangs over our heads as the cradle of civilization once again erupts in war.—Donald Garfield

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Even in Wartime, Museums Must Keep Up the Good Fight

By Geoffrey Platt Jr.

ormally a new session of Congress gets off to a slow start. Members are sworn in and then promptly leave for several weeks of a "district work period," reconvening at the end of January to hear the President's State of the Union address and receive his budget. Then, a week later, they leave town again for the Presidents Day recess and heavy local politicking.

But the 102nd Congress, which convened January 3, has been different: Congress stayed in session after the swearing in to debate the authorization for the President to use military force in the Persian Gulf, and then,

like everyone else, watched the war unfold. Legislators returning from the 101st Congress, the last session of which was long and trying, barely had time to recuperate; many new members found themselves casting their first votes on whether the U.S. should go to war.

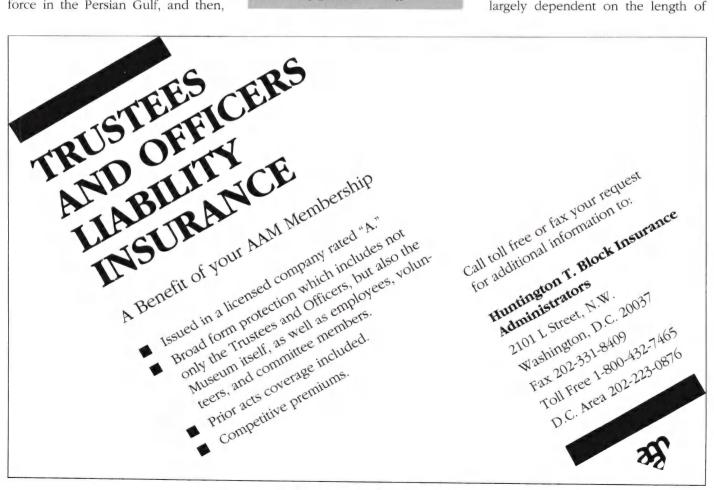
Thus the 102nd Congress has begun—with the nation at war and the economy in recession. Congress faces those challenges as well as the feder-

Geoffrey Platt Jr. is AAM's director of government affairs.

al deficit and a weakened banking system. What does this environment mean for issues on Capitol Hill important to museums, and dare we even *ask* that question in the face of such monumental national problems?

To the second question, the answer is a clear Yes. We cannot look forward to business as usual, but the nation's domestic business will continue to be conducted—and proper support of our cultural institutions should be very much a part of that business.

The war will end, although perhaps not as early as we hope. The recession also will end, its duration largely dependent on the length of



the war. But more important, even if these conditions persist, museum advocates cannot let up in their effort to persuade lawmakers of the need to have the federal government do its part in strengthening museums.

It is not a new argument that the value of museums to society becomes most evident in a time of national peril. The importance of collecting, preserving, and interpreting our cultural resources seems even clearer when our moorings seem to be slipping, the world around us in disarray.

We are reminded that the Arts Council of Great Britain was created during the Blitz in World War II, and that in more recent times, President Nixon increased the budget of the National Endowment for the Arts (N.E.A.) sevenfold from 1970 to 1974—in the middle of the war in Vietnam. He did so at least partly, as one of his advisors has said, because he wanted an issue that would unify, rather than divide, the public.

But difficult times are often used too as a rationale for cutting or eliminating programs. We can expect to hear opponents of N.E.A., for example, recast their arguments for elimination of the agency in terms of the foolishness of funding a "frill" while the nation is in crisis.

We cannot ignore the fiscal realities in which the government must oper-

In peace or war, museums are part of the strength of the U.S. and deserve government support. We should not besitate to carry this message to Congress

ate. Respect should be shown for the hard choices legislators will have to make in the months ahead to keep the ship of state not only afloat but steaming ahead. But for them to make the right choices, advocates for specific programs or causes must put their best cases forward, and that includes the one for federal funding for museums. If museum supporters hold

back, advocates for other programs will gladly step forward and take their place.

Some have said that the federal cultural programs have a built-in safety in numbers—that the appropriations are so small that their elimination or reduction would hardly make a difference. It is true that the \$50 million cost of one F-15E fighter jet roughly equals the last two years' appropriations for the Institute of Museum Services. But the virulent attacks against N.E.A. in 1990 should disabuse proponents of the small budget theory; it was not the dollars involved but what they symbolized.

In short, nothing will take the place of local leaders marshaling the best arguments, bringing them to legislators who will make the decisions, and presenting them with conviction. In peace or war, boom or bust, museums are part of the strength of the nation and deserve government support. We should not hesitate to carry this message to Congress, even as it contends with extraordinary events at home and abroad.



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Museums and Native Americans: Coming Into Clearer Focus

A lthough opinion among Museum News readers responding to the January/February Your Vantage Point question is divided on the focus of relations between museums and Native Americans, the clear

majority says the emphasis indeed is

shifting from issues of repariation to

issues of cultural understanding.

A director in California writes, "I believe the relationship is evolving into one of broader involvement and interaction. After all, we need each other. We will have to work at the relationship, however, because this kind of change won't happen by itself."

A Wisconsin curator adds, "Let's face

it: Many museums' Indian collections are not respected or cared for properly. And often, museums take themselves too seriously, making mountains out of molehills. Our museum always has had good relations with Native Americans because we listen to them, and they listen to us. I work with a group of dedicated Indians who wish to see their cultural items preserved—but at the same time, they want to learn from them. Consequently, our institution sometimes uses carefully crafted reproductions rather than sacred items in exhibitions."

A collections manager in the District of Columbia says, "As a Native Amer-

ican, I often have felt my colleagues' unease in my presence, mostly because they seem to feel Native Americans are overly critical of museums and discount the great emotional uplifting visitors can receive when viewing cultural material. But when the majority of museum professionals gain an understanding of *our* cultural values —as I believe they will—this will only serve to enhance the educational experience for all."

From a Wyoming curator: "With respect to human remains, there should be little doubt that their final disposition should be outlined in the museum's deaccessioning policy. As for

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relations with Native Americans, they should be carefully measured to be sure the museum is dealing with legitimate groups that have genuine tribal credentials. Political activitists with their own agendas and no direct connenction to the issues at hand will only cause trouble."

A Texas administrator says, "It's only natural that the relationship should move from a relatively narrow focus—repatriation—to one of wider cooperation. The important thing is that museums are learning about serving the needs of a community, however that term might be defined."

And a director in Montana says, "I agree that the main issue ought to be control of one's heritage. My museum has an exhibit that examines five 'truthful' versions of one incident in-

The relationship is
evolving into one of
broader involvement and
interaction between
museums and tribes. But
we will have to
work at it; it won't
happen by itself

volving Indians—with the result being, of course, five different points of view. In this way, we begin to balance equitably."

Several readers voice doubt about the tenor of future museum/Native American relations. An Illinois registrar, for example, writes, "The focus of relations will never shift until museum professionals are willing to return half of their Native American Indian collections, if necessary."

And a New York administrator concludes, "The repatriation and reburial issue will persist as divisive as long as emotional and political objectives take precedence over scholarship and objectivity. Cultural interpretation is a two-way street, and all parties involved should be prepared for the judgment of time."



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Advertiser (Circle #)	Page
Abbeville Press, Inc. (85)	88
Acoustiguide Corp. (12)	27
Allen Insurance Associates (52)	9
American Association for	
State & Local History (40)	31
American Institute for	
Conservation (39)	94
Antioch University (93)	93
Bausch & Lomb (10)	84
Blackbaud Microsystems (28)	82
Huntington T. Block	
Insurance (22, 44)	7, 90
Chemart Co. (111)	3
Cinebar Video Productions (27)	93

Advertiser (Circle #)	Page	Advertiser (Circle #)	Page
Vincent Ciulla Design (94)	77	Oaktree Software Specialists (64)	76
Cost of Wisconsin, Inc. (99)	13	Omni Films	
Crystalizations Systems (60)	87	International (1) Inside From	nt Cover
Cuadra Associates (67)	95	Oro Manufacturing (33)	15
Curatorial Assistance (91)	89	Proto Productions (46)	92
Cyro Industries (4)	6	Research Marketing (72)	78
Deaton Museum Services (98)	86	Ross Ehlert Photo	
Doron Precision Systems (36)	19	Labs (83) Inside Bac	k Cover
Edmund Scientific Co. (56)	93	Rust Insurance Agency (16)	82
Exhibits Unlimited (32)	22	Smith Kramer, Inc. (41)	85
Expand Systems (95)	78	Smithsonian Institution	
Getty Center for the Arts (2)	17	Press (81, 97)	91, 33
Historical Documents Co. (80)	80	Spacesaver Corp. (18)	66
Lawrence Metal Products (43)	14	Syma Systems (75)	77
Learning Technologies, Inc. (77)	23	Technovision, Inc. (92)	10
Leone Design Group (53)	20	TIAA-CREF (9)	24-25
Lighting Services, Inc. (30)	11	1220 Exhibits (29)	75
Lynch Museum Services (58)	81	Vistascope Corp. (15)	89
Lyons Zaremba (96)	80	The Charles Webb Co. (17)	87
Mailworks, Inc. (49)	86	Willoughby Associates (84) Bac	ck Cover
Museum Store Association (45)	79	Woodburn Associates (61)	12
Nortec Industries (8)	33	Wordstock (86)	1

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For registration information contact: AIC, 1400 16th Street, N.W., Suite 340, Washington, D.C. 20036; (202)232-6636. *Partial Funding Provided by: The Professional Services Program of the Institute of Museum Services.

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Benefit from the Best Our Profession Has to Give

By Edward H. Able Jr.

ew of us at AAM or among the members of the annual meeting planning committees could have foreseen the timeliness of the Denver meeting's overarching theme, Forces of Change. In both our personal and professional lives, concern about the unpredictability of change has greatly consumed our thoughts and actions.

Within the museum profession, the shock of events in the Mideast and the challenges produced by a diminishing economy underscore how important it is for us to benefit from each other's wisdom, experience, and imagination. This becomes all the more apparent as we chart the course museums should take if they are to successfully face the challenges that lie before them.

AAM's annual gathering, May 19–23, provides a forum for expressing unity among colleagues and constitutes one of the most important vehicles for many in the profession to take time out of their daily work to renew themselves.

The changes now taking place in museums and in the world in which they exist will be reflected throughout the meeting, from keynote speakers to program sessions. From manage-



ment to volunteers, museum training to fund raising and institutional evaluation, panels and speakers will address current needs. Sessions will offer concrete alternatives as we forge our way through the uncertainties to come.

It is particularly important this year for AAM members to take part in programs and provide their insights into

Edward H. Able Jr. is executive director of the American Association of Museums.

how they perceive change and its effect on the museum profession. Speakers such as John Brademas (former university president, congressman, and champion of the National Endowment for the Arts) and Guillermo Gomez-Peña (minister of border culture in San Diego) will address participants.

As we look for ways to maximize our current resources and make decisions about the future of our institutions, I hope AAM members recognize the centrality of the unique opportunities offered by the annual meeting to inform our problem solving and form those interpersonal and institutional networks that support our work.

A healthy turnout at the meeting will be a tribute to the commitment of our profession to meet the future, whatever the changes may entail, and with the confidence that we are following the best advice our profession has to give.

There is no better way to strengthen our collective and individual positions in these anxious and changing times than to join with your professional colleagues at AAM's Denver annual meeting.

Coming in future issues of



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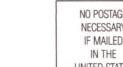
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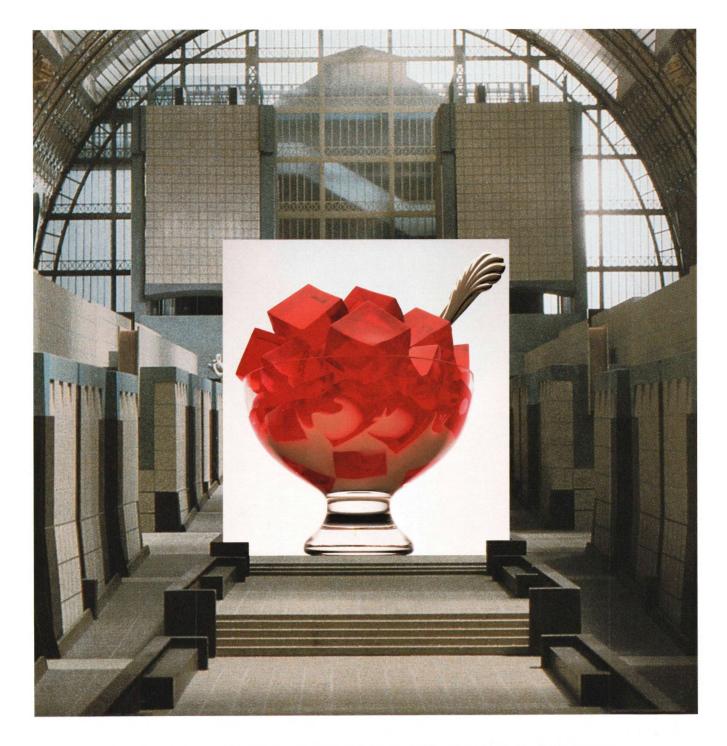
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